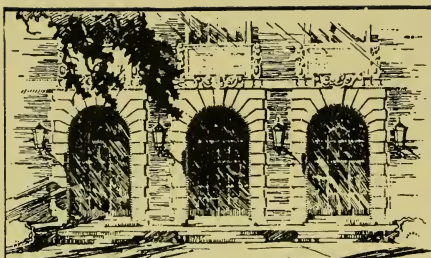


THE GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA

A WARRIOR STORY

BY
HUGH GODDARD WILKINSON





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GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA

A MANX STORY

BY

HUGH COLEMAN DAVIDSON

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1887.

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ELLAN VANNIN.

(THE ISLE OF MAN.)

When the summer day is over and its busy cares have flown,
I sit beneath the twilight, with a weary heart alone;
There rises like a vision, sparkling bright in nature's glee,
My own dear Ellan Vannin and its green hills by the sea.

Then I hear the wavelets murmur as they kiss the fairy shore,
And beneath the emerald waters sings the mermaid as of yore;
And the fair isle shines in beauty as in youth it dawned on me,
My own dear Ellan Vannin and its green hills by the sea.

Then memories sweet and tender come like music's plaintive flow
Of the hearts in Ellan Vannin that loved me long ago;
And I give with tears and blessings my fondest thoughts to thee,
My own dear Ellan Vannin and thy green hills by the sea.

MRS. CRAVEN GREEN.

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THE GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA.

CHAPTER I.

TEHI-TEGI.

IT was a sunny July morning in the second quarter of the present century.

At a window of one of the houses on the south side of Castletown market-place sat a beautiful woman. Though still young, she was dressed as a widow: not as one who must soothe her feelings by plunging ecstatically into billows of crape, but with a regard for appearances which hinted at a hope somewhere.

Her mother—a more orthodox widow—stood behind, resting her jewelled hands on her daughter's shoulders, and apparently gazing beyond the quiet scene outside.

The view from the window was limited—in front by the grim old fortress of Castle Rushen, with its one-handed Elizabethan clock and Cardinal Wolsey's glacis, overgrown with grass, amid which stood an antique town-cross and sun-dial; on the right, whence came the murmur of the sea, by St. Mary's, the Government chapel, a long oblong castellated structure, with a circular tower in the centre; and on the left by a couple of narrow streets converging upon the market-place, Arbory Street terminating in the barracks, and Malew Street in the custom-house, so that the two buildings faced each other. In the foreground rose a tall Doric column, erect-

ed to commemorate a former Lieutenant-Governor of the island. Being of freestone, it presented a marked contrast to the grey limestone of which the whole town was built.

As regards animation, there was scarcely more than usual. A few old fishermen were dozing on the slabs around the sundial; a tethered goat was menacing a dog on the glaxis; a sentry was pacing in front of the barrack gate; and a butcher's cart, with scales attached in order that each joint might be cut and weighed at the door, was moving from house to house.

There was also a quartette, consisting of Major Christorey, a member of the House of Keys; Mr. Watterson, Captain of the Parish; Dr. Mylworry, who had a number of greyhounds scampering after him; and Mr. Hudson, the Government

chaplain, a benevolent old clergyman in swallow-tail coat, knee-breeches, and buckled shoes. They walked to and fro with their hands behind their backs, as if they had nothing particular to do. In fact, they had met together for a gentle gossip, as was their custom of a morning.

Besides this elderly quartette, there were a couple of young men walking by themselves. The sturdy young fellow with the handsome, changeful face and curly brown hair was an advocate, Frank Maddrell by name; and his taller companion, with the villainous-looking Irish terrier at his heels, was Major Christorey's only son. Frank had acquired a certain local reputation by his literary pretensions, but so far they had led to nothing more. This, however, was quite enough to explain the deferential bearing of Ned Christorey.

The first time the two friends passed the window where Diana Knighton was sitting, they raised their hats to her, but neither glanced in her direction again. Whatever the cause, a look of disappointment crept over the exquisitely-cut features, the pretty little mouth quivered and then tightened, and the brilliant dark eyes clouded until they almost matched in colour the masses of jet-black hair upon the proudly-poised head.

Presently the mother withdrew. Soon afterwards the daughter rose from her seat and disappeared—behind the curtains, where she remained for a moment or two peeping.

If she had expected to see any change in the situation, she found herself mistaken, for gossip was still the order of the day.

‘Manxmen,’ Frank was declaring in his

impulsive way, 'should stand by one another, whatever happens.'

'But don't you think, Frank,' Ned ventured to ask, with all humility, 'it was rather rough-and-ready treatment?'

An Irish boat had brought into the harbour a cargo of herrings caught on Sunday, and a party of Manxmen—who are such strict Sabbatarians that they fish neither on Saturday night nor on Sunday—had boarded the sinner and tossed the herrings into the water. The result had been a very pretty fight, which was the subject under discussion.

'You should look at the matter reasonably, Ned,' returned Frank. 'Even if we Manxmen were in the wrong, it is not for us to say so.'

'No?'

'Decidedly not. No race could possibly be bound by stronger ties than we are.'

Above everything, we must be a united family. Look at our history! Look at our traditions! Look there!' He turned and stood pointing to the Castle. 'That grand old hero of a hundred fights should be our rallying point if ever we want one. Nearly nine hundred years old, Ned, for it was built by Guthred, son of Orry, in the middle of the tenth century.'

It was a good deal of power to be produced by a very small spark, but nothing uncommon for Frank. He would probably have gone through the whole history had not Ned said, with his great grey eyes opened wider than usual,

'By Jove, Frank, and I've never once been inside it!'

Here was a melancholy specimen of a patriot if you like! Never once inside the Castle! Frank's look of amazement and contempt was sublime. But before he

could find words, a number of young men arrived upon the scene, and the conversation took a lighter turn.

They were all advocates, of course ; for the Bar is and ever has been the sole profession of Manxmen. Nevertheless, there was nothing very lawyer-like about them ; indeed, they were dressed more like amateur yachtsmen. Their hands and faces were bronzed by exposure to the sun, and all their conversation was of the sea.

While they were arranging for some yachting expedition, Diana Knighton came down the steps of her house. As if at the word of command, the elderly quartette swung round on its left pivot, four hats came off simultaneously, and four heads were bowed before the fascinating young widow. When she had smilingly acknowledged the salute, the four marched on again, but not without casting an occasion-

al glance of envy at the advocates who had grouped themselves around her.

Although, in Frank's opinion, Diana laboured under the terrible disadvantage of being an Englishwoman, he could not deny her surpassing loveliness, which not even the widow's poke-bonnet and cap could detract from. As she stood there, with the sunlight falling on her tall, graceful figure, and kindling, as it seemed, in the lustrous eyes which had a bewitching smile for all her admirers, she certainly looked a woman to drive a man to distraction. While her pretty coquetry played upon all alike, it was so cleverly done that each laid the flattering unction to his soul that he was the favoured mortal. Some there were who thought her a heartless flirt, and yet she did but nod, and the advocates were flying on her errands in all directions. Yes, she would be de-

lighted to go for a sail in the afternoon. Away went Sammy Kneale helter-skelter to tell old Jonathan Vondy about the boat. Yes, she would love a picnic above everything. Away dashed that huge fellow, John Moore, to make the necessary arrangements.

Ned and Frank alone showed no great eagerness to precipitate themselves about the place. They remained talking with her until the others returned, anxious to accompany her for a walk. But this she refused to sanction. Laughingly shaking her head at them, she glided up Malew Street, and vanished into a shop, while the young men stood in a semi-circle looking after her. Then they turned, and each stared hard at the faces of his companions.

They had grown wonderfully silent, these frolicsome advocates. Gloom was

written on their manly foreheads, and distrust lurked in the corners of their eyes. Not one of them could have uttered a joke now to save his life. From this awkward predicament they were rescued by the appearance of the Lieutenant-Governor. Preceded, as on all state occasions, by a gorgeous sergent-major, His Excellency crossed the market-place and entered the barracks, where there was an unusual bustle, the detachment having received orders to join the regiment at head-quarters. The mess-sergeant was hurrying about paying bills; orderlies were running in and out; and the sentry was having a busy time with all manner of persons who pestered him with questions, and wanted to get inside the yard.

There was a subaltern leaning out of one of the windows of the officers' quarters, and Frank went to speak to him.

While he was thus engaged, the High Bailiff* joined the quartette in the market-place, and his gold snuff-box at once became the chief object of interest.

Five minutes later the Castle clock struck the hour, whereupon every watch was drawn from its fob and set right for the day. When Frank looked again, lo! a wilderness, even the drowsy old fishermen having disappeared. Everybody had strolled into the Court to see what was going on.

Frank went in the same direction; crossing the market-place to follow the road round the glacis, and passing the little square in which stood the House of Keys. At the Castle gate he paused irresolutely. Several cases of assault and battery, arising out of the fight between

* A combination of stipendiary magistrate, mayor, and coroner.

the Manx and Irish fishermen, were being tried within. Should he go to hear them? He looked at the sentry posted before the guard-room opposite; he looked into the harbour, which was lined with vessels, the yards of those on the further side almost touching the windows of the houses; he looked along the quay, where quaint old women, in the biggest of white caps, were knitting at their doorways; and, finally, he walked towards the ancient drawbridge which spanned the entrance to the harbour. It was surely strange that Frank Maddrell, after his lofty profession of patriotism, should keep away from the Court this morning.

The drawbridge passed, he took the road to the right, which led towards Douglas. There was a sharp elbow by a smithy, and then the bay lay full in view, a breast-high wall alone separating the shingly

beach from the road, with its short fringe of houses followed by a long strip of high garden-walls.

It was with some surprise that Frank noticed Diana Knighton in front of him. She was sauntering along in a purposeless way, now glancing across the sheeny sea at the promontory of Langness, and now playing with the embroidered bag which it was fashionable in those days to carry on the left arm. Chancing to turn round, she caught sight of Frank, so he had to quicken his pace.

He did not appear to be quite as pleased at the meeting as she did, but this may have been merely a man's awkwardness in the presence of a beautiful woman, well though he knew her. Having spent two years in the town, Diana had fallen into many of its ways, and addressed her friends—Frank among the number—by their

Christian names, a thing that he had never ventured to do in her case.

‘Going far, Mrs. Knighton?’ he asked, as they walked along side by side.

‘No, only for a stroll,’ replied Diana.

The gentleness of her manner towards him was so different from her playfulness in the market-place that it was hard to imagine her the same creature. She had a remarkably sweet voice—one of those finely modulated voices that suggest nothing so much as music floating across the moonlit sea; and yet one glance at her was enough to show it could also express the more stormy feelings of human nature.

‘But, Frank,’ added she, laying a dainty little hand upon his arm, ‘you call all the other girls by their Christian names. Why am I made the exception?’

‘Oh, but we have all been to the same

dame's school, and we have all grown up together—so it's quite different.'

'But,' said Diana, with a roguish twinkle in her eyes, 'even if I have not had the honour of being whipped with you, as I hear the Colquitts used to be, we have had many pleasant hours together. There's a handsome compliment for you,' she said, lightly, to conceal her vexation at his silence. 'Now, won't you do as I ask?'

'I'll try, of course, if you really wish it.'

'I don't like being singular,' she hastened to explain. These words brought a very pretty blush to her cheeks, and necessitated a further explanation. 'It makes me feel an outsider when I am Mrs. Knighton, and all the others are Nessie and Mona, and so on.' Her eyes furtively sought his, but he was staring at the dazzling limestone road beneath his feet,

which may have accounted for his change of colour. There was a slight tremor in her voice as she added, with feminine ingenuity, 'You can't blame me, Frank, for wishing to conform with Manx customs.'

'Not at all, Mrs.—'

'Then begin at once, sir,' she laughed.

Frank blushed at her, and blushed at the road, and blushed at the sea, and finally stammered out,

'Diana.'

'Dear me, it might be a dose of castor-oil. You are not by any means perfect in your lesson. Please, repeat it, sir.'

'Diana,' said Frank, glancing rather wistfully at a house standing in a garden.

It was just beyond a little recess where a sentry was posted before the lodge-gates of Government House. Frank's footsteps had begun to lag, as if he was approaching

his destination. But Diana having launched out into a long story, politeness compelled him to walk on with her. When they arrived at the end of the garden wall, they beheld a young woman advancing along the Douglas Road, and a very strange being along the Shore Road, which at this point branches off from the other.

This strange being was clad in *carranes*,* dark-blue trousers, three ancient swallow-tail coats which were a mass of pockets and huge buttons, and lastly a shaggy top-hat without any brim. He was short and slim in figure, with a merry but otherwise expressionless face, pale-blue eyes, and yellow hair. Though he was invariably called Bobby Beg,† his proper name was

* Sandals of untanned leather. They were worn by all the peasantry a generation earlier, and by many at this time.

† *Beg* signifies little.

Kelly, which would scarcely have distinguished him in a land where Kellys are so common. His mother had got rid of all responsibility for his want of brains by declaring him to be an elfin changeling. He never walked—always danced along singing, as now. He was trolling out :

‘The king can only dance a reel,
And I can do the same ;
I dances on my toes and heel,
And that’s the for I came.’

But when the young woman emerged on the road before him, his song instantly changed to a shout of—

‘Tehi-tegi ! Tehi-tegi !’

It was not until he was nearly abreast of Diana and Frank that Bobby Beg ceased to call out these curious words, and then he took off the shaggy brimless hat with both hands and made a profound bow to the beautiful young widow. After that,

he stood staring at her in open-mouthed admiration.

She would have belied her sex had she been insensible to this tribute to her charms, coming though it did from such a humble individual as Bobby Beg, and she gave him a kindly smile and nod in passing. Moreover, it was more than pity that prompted her next words.

‘Is Bobby Beg able to do any work, Frank?’ she asked.

‘Oh, yes, when he can get it.’

‘Then I shall give the poor fellow something to do in my garden. And what does he mean by crying out, “Tehi-tegi”?’

‘I’ll tell you all about it, Mrs.—Diana,’ said Frank, glowing with pleasure at the chance of relating one of his beloved legends. ‘It was before the Stanleys were kings of Man, perhaps in the days of the Orrys, perhaps even in the days of the

mighty magician Mannanan—at any rate, it was very long ago that there lived in the island a wonderful enchantress, whose name was Tehi-tegi. With her floating jet-black hair, and wild dark eyes, and smile-lit face, she was lovely beyond the power of words to tell, and her ways were so winsome and her accents so silvery that all the Manxmen fell desperately in love with her. Wherever she went, they followed; and a very dreadful state of affairs ensued. The lands were unploughed, the fields covered with stones, the cattle died from want of pasture, the peat was uncut in the turbaries, and the fishery neglected. Everything went to rack and ruin, and, only to think of it, all through love of a beautiful woman! But listen, there was worse to come. One day Tehi-tegi mounted her milk-white palfrey, and, at the head of her six hundred lovers, made a tri-

umphal procession through the island. At length they arrived at what was really a deep river, though Tehi-tegi made it look quite shallow and easy for fording. Oh, yes, she was a very crafty woman, this lovely creature with the smile-lit face and silvery accents, and there was no limit to her cruel power. When the poor deluded Manxmen were in the middle of the river, she suddenly made a great wind sweep a deluge of water upon them, and every one was drowned. Then, with a mocking laugh, she changed her milk-white palfrey into a porpoise and herself into a bat. It was a bitter lesson, and Manxmen have laid it to heart. When they see a woman before them, they call out "Tehi-tegi!" as a charm; and, lest the same disaster should happen again, they always used to ride in front, while their wives and daughters followed on foot, carrying their shoes and

stockings in their hands, and only putting them on "for fashion's sake" before entering a town. Some of the farmers still adhere to the safe old custom.'

While Frank was speaking, Diana watched him intently, her face lighting up at a description which might very well apply to her own person, but afterwards darkening with a variety of suppressed emotions. It was easy to see that she was undergoing a mental struggle. When he ceased, she remained silent, walking thoughtfully by his side.

Frank, who was rather hasty in drawing conclusions, felt not a little nettled at her silence. He ascribed it to a want of interest in his story, perhaps the one thing that he found least endurable. His pictures were very real to him; they were scenes in which he himself lived while he was describing them; he saw them, as it

were, being enacted under his very eye, either in some wild glen along the coast, or among the rugged mountains, which were even now smiling at him from beneath a sunny sky. Such being the case, he was naturally never more vexed than when he had impulsively depicted one of these scenes for the benefit of some unimaginative person, who passed on with merely a shrug of the shoulders.

It was therefore with the greatest relief that he listened to Diana's comment, even though it was made, not from his artistic standpoint, but from a practical one which was quite beyond him.

'Frank,' she said, softly, 'the beauty that Time takes from the living, he adds to the dead. The real Tehi-tegi is still alive, and only a common-place woman after all. She is not, and never has been, half as beautiful as you imagine.'

‘Oh! but think of her with her pretty cajolery, now teasing and now petting, pretending to frown upon one and smiling upon another, and always surrounded by a throng of enraptured faces—poor, foolish things! Indeed, indeed she must have been very lovely.’

After some hesitation, Diana said, with a slight accession of colour,

‘You don’t understand my meaning, Frank. There is something of Tehi-tegi in every woman. It is our nature to make ourselves look as charming as possible. The brightest flowers attract the most bees, you know; and, if the bees happen to come to grief upon the thorns—well,’ said she, with a ripple of laughter, ‘one must exercise a little judgment in such matters. I suppose Tehi-tegi’s lovers had eyes, otherwise they would scarcely have been able to admire her.’

Diana appeared to have shifted her ground.

‘But,’ urged Frank, ‘she threw her witchery around them.’

‘That is a man’s way of looking at it. No doubt a scapegoat is a very useful animal, but in most cases it should be provided with panniers like a donkey, so as to carry a double load. Surely Tehitegi cannot be held responsible for her good looks! If men chose to fall in love with her and into the water afterwards, they should blame their own want of judgment.’

‘But they died for their love,’ remonstrated Frank, also drawn away from his original position; ‘and what could be a sweeter death than that?’

‘Suppose they had lived to regret. Suppose that, living in their ruined cottages, starving because the crops lay rotting

on the ground and the cattle dead in the fields, miserable at the failure of their foolish infatuation, they had to think of the lovely Tehi-tegi, with the smile-lit face and silvery accents, as nothing but a sooty bat! Can you imagine their feelings then, Frank?’

‘Yes,’ he answered, in a hollow voice, and with a pained, far-away look in his eyes; as if he really beheld these wretched beings. ‘Yes, I can. They are crouching by the side of the silent river, with their heads buried in their hands: too exhausted even to weep, wearily waiting for Death, who seems so long in coming, to ferry them across to the dark land beyond.’

‘That is very sad, Frank,’ said Diana, gently. ‘But in this world folly is punished more severely than sin. So remember—— But, dear me, what nonsense I’ve

been talking! I wonder what the next batch of officers will be like.' And then she glided into the lightest topics, talking and laughing as if it were quite impossible for her to be serious for two moments together.

She was a wonderful puzzle to Frank, who found it no easy matter to follow her in her swift flight from one mood to another. These queenly women have usually a touch of the marble about them; they are statuesque, lest they should be awkward. But Diana Knighton was as graceful as a swallow, and as changeful as an April day. Had she been warning Frank against herself? or against some one else? or against her sex generally? Was the coquette in conflict with the woman? If so, what could bring about such a state of affairs? Her own indecision rendered the answer difficult.

Not that Frank Maddrell was troubled by these questions. Even if his eyes had been less strongly fixed upon the fanciful Tehi-tegi, he would not have had time to consider Diana's application of the legend, for she talked all the way back to Castle-town.

Afterwards, when he came to think it over, he was quite astonished at her cleverness in choosing subjects that interested him. She had led him past the house in the garden a second time!

NOTE.—The legend of Tehi-tegi occurs in Waldron's curious old book reprinted by the Manx Society, to whose publications I am indebted for much other material.—H. C. D.

CHAPTER II.

SUNSET.

THE sun was setting behind the mountains : a row of fine old giants from whose shoulders descended a patchwork of moorland and meadow and cornland which stopped only at the water's edge. Barrule and Cronk-ny-Irey-lhaa were flaming like beacons in the still clear air, and there poured out of the west a fan-shaped flood of gold and crimson which gradually faded into a delicate pink and amber in the far east. The sea was a burnished mirror, reflecting the colouring overhead so accurately, that

the meeting of sea and sky was scarcely discernible. Upon the horizon where the Cumbrian hills were dimly outlined, lay the new moon like a silver boat. The headlands beyond Poolvash had a dark forbidding aspect; but if the tide was surging around Kitterland and breaking in foam upon the Thousla Rock, the Calf Islet was radiant in purple, and The Eye—a solitary rock with a large arch-like perforation—beamed pleasantly on the glistening current that glided towards it.

Viewed from Scarlett, the western horn of Castletown Bay and the eastern horn of Poolvash, the houses clustering around Castle Rushen resembled a swarm of bees clustering around the queen, on which their very existence depended. Farther along the shore, and some little distance beyond the house at which Frank Madrell had hesitated in the morning, stood

the old ruin of Hango Hill, with the sea rippling over the pebbles to its base, and King William's College behind, and Snaefell Garraghan and Bein-y-Phot in the far background. Farther round still, a number of gulls were hovering over a narrow strip of greensward between two seas—the Racecourse, where 'Stanlagh Moar' * King of Man, surrounded by his little Court, beheld the first Derby instituted by himself, and run a hundred-and-fifty years before Epsom was heard of. And beyond this again the gorse was glowing on the long, low, rugged promontory of Langness, which seemed bent on crawling across the bay towards the Stack of Scarlett, a great black dome of crystalline basalt which, as the rocks around amply testify, marks the site of a submarine volcano.

While the sun was still a hand's-breadth

* 'The Great Stanley': the seventh Earl of Derby.

above the horizon, Nessie Colquitt and Ned Christorey ensconced themselves in a cosy nook near the Stack. They had been helping Mona Colquitt to collect some seaweeds for the purpose of decoration, and had left her engaged in that occupation. She could do better without their assistance, she had told them; and they had taken her at her word.

It was much pleasanter to sit on that broken wall of volcanic ash and lava welded into a sort of porphyrite, watching the wavelets run toddling to their feet, and listening to their merry lispings prattle. The Manx, in common with some other nations, have a pretty fancy about the sea. The sparkling crests of the waves are, they say, the jewels of Ben Varrey,* and their music is the song she sings to entice mortals away from them. Some-

* The mermaid.

where down in the crystal water among the tasselled stalks of the long brown seaweed, there is a grand town of countless towers and gilded minarets in which she lives, feasting off golden plates and drinking out of golden goblets, and even attending church, for on many a Sunday morning the sailors can hear the bells ringing. Indeed it would be hard to enumerate all the wonderful things that Ben Varrey does in her splendid home under the sea.

Nessie knew all about them; was it this that made her so silent? Whatever the subject of her thoughts, she kept it to herself. In the beautiful land of dreams, there are many mysteries that the wayfarer prefers to linger over in solitude. For Nessie, those purple clouds banked upon the horizon had been crystallised into the real landscapes of the future, and

the awakening breeze whispered of a sweet life in store for her, and the murmur of the sea was a wedding-march. This was quite enough to explain the smile that played about her rosy, half-open lips.

Seated just above the water's edge, Nessie made a charming picture. She was slight in figure, and not very tall; and, if you had peeped down the quaint poke-bonnet she wore, you would have seen a vision of dimpled cheeks, and hazel eyes, and nut-brown hair carefully braided away from a bright, young, pensive face. Like her sister Mona, she had a perfect complexion, fresh and clear, and the skin as soft as a peach; and yet, strangely enough, neither sun nor sea appeared to affect it in any way.

By the side of such a companion, Ned Christorey looked shockingly clumsy. Nor was the contrast lost upon himself, for he

was evidently much dissatisfied with his appearance. He glanced in a deprecatory way at his own person, and then, with a strange softening of his rugged features, at Nessie. Finally his great grey eyes rested on his boots, which were none too small. Recognising this, he hastily moved them to one side, so that they should not attract attention.

Ned felt it extremely embarrassing that Nessie should be so unconscious of what was going on in his mind. He had resolved to take the desperate leap that he had been meditating for months, yet knew not how to set about it.

While he was still hesitating, he noticed a long-necked cormorant floating like a black bottle in the water close to the rocks. Presently it dived, and reappeared with a small callig struggling in its beak. The next moment the bird gave a crunch, and

the fish's head and tail fell into the sea, and, hey presto! the fish itself had vanished. Now that, thought Ned, is the way to dispose of a slippery question. Off with the head and tail, and swallow the rest whole.

So the ancient principal of omens which has more vitality than is generally imagined, induced Ned to plunge *in medias res*. After a cough to attract notice, he said, earnestly,

‘Nessie, I *do* love you. And do you love me? And will you marry me?’

The speech was a little abrupt, perhaps. But at no time was Ned a wastrel of words, and these contained his meaning to the brim.

Nessie gave him a swift startled look.

‘You dear old kind Ned,’ she said, in tones of such deep pity that his heart sank like lead, ‘you know I’m so—so fond of

you ; but, indeed—indeed I can't marry you.'

'Why not, Nessie?' he gasped.

'Ned, we have always been like brother and sister. Oh, but it would be a strange thing for us to think of marriage!'

'But I'll be less a brother in future. And then, Nessie?'

'Let us be the same always!' she pleaded, laying her hand tenderly upon his arm. 'Let us remain dear friends! Oh! why should we change when we have been so happy?'

'Friends!' he exclaimed, bitterly, and the rest of the speech wrung from him in his anguish was equally unlike himself. 'Friends! Most people miss a friend as much as a tooth: a slight inconvenience at first, and then a dentist replaces the one and an acquaintance the other. Is it to be so between you and me, Nessie?'

Are we to be no more to one another than that? I had hoped—— But what a brute I am! I didn't mean to distress you. I—I scarcely know what I'm saying.' He turned towards her with a look of patient suffering in his face like a dumb animal's.

Nessie was in an exceedingly painful position. She and Ned had played together in childhood; they had been boon companions in these later days; they had always been the staunchest of friends, aiding one another in their little difficulties, and each upholding the other against all comers. But never once had she suspected the true state of his feelings towards her. They had been, as she had said, like brother and sister, and a greater love than this had never entered her head. His words had come upon her as a sudden revelation, casting a wholly different complexion upon their past lives. When she

recovered from the first shock, she threw all the blame for what happened upon her own shoulders. She must have encouraged him, she told herself; yet when she came to search for a particular instance, she could not find one.

In these days of modern refinement, it has become fashionable for maidens to treat their lovers as so many entrées—to refuse some with a disdainful shake of the head, and to trifle with others *pour passer le temps*. In this simple way they can vary the courses indefinitely, and spread a very pleasant feast over a period so long that it extends almost from the cradle to the grave. There are others, however, whose tastes lead them to adopt a different method for making life pass smoothly: they are determined anglers. When Isaac Walton told his disciples to bait with a frog ‘as if they loved him,’ he little thought

what apt pupils he would have among the fair sex, though the venue of the gentle sport has been slightly shifted. Poor 'froggie that will a-wooing go' is likely to fare badly when he falls into their hands, his plaintive croak notwithstanding.

But Nessie, living in old-world times and in an old-world spot, knew nothing of these tender arts. She was young and innocent, or ignorant, call it which you will. In her eyes, love was a beautiful halo, as real as the sunset glow around her; it was a sacred mystery, inscrutable, yet fascinating, attainable to the lowest as well as the highest, yet to be approached only with reverence. Instead of being as proud of Ned as a peacock of its first tail-feather, she was unutterably grieved, for she felt that she had dealt her best friend the heaviest blow that one human being can deal another. Her young heart ached

for this poor suffering fellow, and she would gladly have given all she possessed to be able to soften the pain. But how?

‘You will be far, far happier with some one else,’ she said, in her pretty, pleading way. ‘Believe me, you poor old Ned, I could never, never, never make you half as happy as you deserve to be. You don’t know what a horrid, cross, bad-tempered thing I can be; you don’t indeed. Oh, but you don’t know anything about me. You think you do, but you don’t really. Mona will tell you I am quite a little volcano—at times,’ added Nessie, not liking to make her character altogether unsightly. ‘So there, Ned! Surely that’s enough to drive this passing foolish fancy away.’

She concluded this ingenious little speech by stroking him on the back as if he were a cat.

‘But it’s no passing fancy,’ said Ned, desperately, ‘and it’s not foolish. It’s real, downright honest love that will never change—no, never. Oh! Nessie,’ he cried, stretching out his arms as if he would have her shelter there for ever, ‘my darling, my darling——’ But there he stopped, and his arms fell back to his side, for she had turned away her head.

What was her objection to him? Watching her for some sign, his eyes eventually rested upon her tiny white hand, beside which his own great brown paw looked so clumsy that he withdrew it from sight. As his next words showed, there was not an atom of conceit in the action, but hope lingered even yet.

‘I know I’m a big, awkward, ugly fellow,’ he went on, humbly, ‘with nothing to make a sweet thing like you care about

me. But oh, Nessie, if there is anything I can alter to gain your love, do tell me, and let me try.'

Ned seemed to think that a heart was to be talked over like an intelligent jury.

'Oh! Ned, why will you misunderstand me? You are far, far too good for me; you are indeed. I can't—don't you see? How can I tell you?'

He looked at her wistfully.

'But in time,' he said, 'you may change. Everybody changes.'

'And you?'

'Oh, but that's quite different.'

She smiled very sadly. But Ned proceeded, eagerly,

'Love never changes—at least, not such love as I have for you. But friendship may grow into love; now, mayn't it, Nessie? Do say it may.'

She could only shake her head.

For some moments there was silence between the two, Ned struggling with a painful choking sensation in his throat. When he had mastered it in some measure, he said, in a hoarse whisper,

‘Then it’s all over. It was only a bright dream, was it, Nessie?’

The poke-bonnet was turned in the direction of the Stack, for the tears were raining down the soft cheeks. Ned heard a sob, but that was all the answer he got.

The glory of the sunset had vanished. The pinks and purples had faded to a sombre grey; a mist was winding around the black headlands, where the gulls and gannets were sleeping in long white rows, and the water plashing on the rocks had a dismal moan. Yet the scene was bright and warm compared with that on which Ned’s dim eyes were fastened—a prospect

of blighted hopes, a loveless life without Nessie.

Forced to relieve his feelings by some physical act, he rose to his feet and pressed both hands tightly against his temples. There was a rocky plateau behind, and his head and shoulders just appeared above it. Turning his back upon the sea, he steadied himself by leaning against this support, for everything was whirling round and round in a dreadful dance, such as he had never seen before.

Ned's anguish was witnessed by a solitary spectator—a dog lying on the rocky plateau within a few feet of him. It was not by any means a gentlemanly dog; on the other hand, it looked, at first sight, an unmitigated ruffian. It was a coarse, rough-haired terrier, with only one ear and a stump of a tail. It had ugly tusks, and, some said, an ugly way of using them

indiscriminately. And yet, as it lay there, with its head between its fore-paws, its eyes watched Ned with such trustful affection that one forgot its unhandsome exterior.

For a minute or so it remained motionless ; but when Ned continued to hide his face, its expression grew troubled. At length it rose, gently laid a paw on his hand, and then retreated a little distance, still watching him earnestly.

Pre-occupied as Ned was with his own painful thoughts, he could not resist this mute appeal. It seemed to him that Toby had discerned his trouble, and taken this singularly touching way of showing its sympathy with him. His eyes glistened as he stroked the shaggy coat, and when he saw the instantaneous brightening of the dog's face, he felt that here, at any rate, was a creature that loved him. It

was some consolation, if a small one.

Ned had obtained Toby in rather an unusual manner. Several years before, he had happened to see an Irish cattle-drover ill-treating a dog, and in his indignation had bowled him over like a ninepin. The act was no sooner committed than repented of. The man, having received a black eye, Ned compensated him with half-a-sovereign, and took the dog. Since then he and Toby had been inseparable companions.

While Ned was caressing his four-footed friend, a girl was laboriously advancing towards them. Except that she wore a large straw hat, she was dressed in dark-blue like Nessie, to whom she bore a certain family resemblance. She was of a taller and stronger build, however; her hair and eyes were a shade darker in colour, and her face might almost have been called

plain, the expression was so firm and decisive. The inevitable reticule hung from her left arm—there were no pockets in the dress in those days—and in her right hand she carried a bunch of seaweeds, which looked very like painted filigree work.

‘Now then, young people,’ she called out, ‘it’s time to be getting home.’

‘We’re ready, Mona,’ replied Ned, wincing at the sting contained in his own words. ‘Don’t trouble to come any farther. We’ll join you.’

Ned’s old-fashioned courtesy was never more noticeable than on this occasion. If there be any truth in that sorry proverb, ‘Familiarity breeds contempt,’ it certainly never applied to him; but the ceremonious way in which he assisted Nessie over the rocks, was in a manner new. Neither of them being able to see very distinctly,

they kept their gaze fixed on the ground, which was so rough as to require great care in walking. Ned held Nessie's hand, but with all his gentleness he was a little clumsy and his assistance rather impeded her than otherwise. He slipped on the crumbling stone more than once, each time nearly bringing her down with him. Toby followed with an expression of anxious wonderment; he never had seen such a staggering young couple in his life.

However, their adventures among those miniature hills and valleys had one good result. It enabled them to compose their features before they joined Mona, whose searching glances would have been extremely embarrassing but for Nessie's ready tact. Beginning with some playful remark about the seaweeds, she engaged her sister in conversation, and sustained it with great spirit during the homeward

walk. If Mona had suspected anything at first, she could do so no longer; it was impossible to imagine that a painful secret lurked in the clear depths of those hazel eyes.

Nessie was a far better hypocrite than Ned. Indeed she acted her part so well that he felt hurt at her cheerfulness when he was utterly miserable. Reproaching himself for the feeling the next moment, he made a desperate attempt to help her in keeping up appearances, but his lips seemed glued together. All that he could do was to escort the two girls over the rocks as carefully as possible.

After leaving the porphyritic dyke, they came upon a stormy sea of limestone: a wonderful place, carrying the mind back to a time when the island was writhing in torment, a flood of molten lava pouring from the Stack, and the rocks where Ned

and Nessie had just been sitting were but a cloud of dust floating over the flaming volcano. The smooth surface of these solid waves was stamped with the likeness of monstrous fish and furrowed by the icebergs of the glacial age. It was also full of tiny basins, each a mimic aquarium containing jelly-like anemones, seaweeds, and pebbles.

Ned led the way across the largest of these valleys and up the grassy slopes beyond. There was an old limekiln standing on the very edge of the beach. It resembled a couple of huge guns planted upright in the ground and encased in masonry, with their touch-holes pointing seawards. From this spot a road round the bay led back to Castletown. By its means Ned and the two girls eventually arrived at the house in a garden—Claddagh House as it was called—where the Colquitts lived.

He stopped at the gate and held out his hand to Mona.

‘But, of course, you’ll have tea with us, Ned,’ she said. ‘I told mother to expect you, and Sheval is making some of your favourite cakes.’

‘No, thank you, Mona. Not this evening.’

‘Why, what’s the meaning of this? You young people have not been quarrelling, “I hope.” And she looked sharply from one to the other. It was Mona’s habit to exaggerate her own age, perhaps as an excuse for the authority she wielded over the household.

‘Quarrelling!’ exclaimed Ned, with some bitterness. ‘Oh, no; we have been making friends. Good-night, Nessie,’ he added, gently. ‘Good-night, Mona. Come along, Toby.’ Then he bowed and closed the gate, shutting them in and himself out.

Now that he was alone with his despair, he staggered as if he would have fallen, but by an effort recovered himself. Grasping his stick more firmly, he said, in a hoarse voice,

‘Toby, we can go home now. Yes, Toby, I think we can go home.’

The dog seemed to think it was being reprimanded, for its stumpy tail fell, and it slunk quietly after its sorrow-stricken master. And so these two walked homewards through the deepening shadows.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

ON Saturday evening Castletown was in a state of tumult. There was a cheap-jack in the little recess between the custom-house and the glacis, but that was not the sole cause of the excitement. Still the recklessness with which he smashed his crockery to show his supreme disregard for money was astonishing enough. Though the market was long over, many quaintly-clad farmers' wives and daughters fluttered moth-like around his cart. Cautious people as they

were, they could not resist the fascination of watching and listening. The mere fact that he had come from the unknown lands beyond the sea invested him with the greatest interest; but, while they marvelled at the strangeness of his dress, his language and his gestures, they viewed with distrust the wonderful bargains he offered them, and bid only in timid whispers at long intervals. Every purchase became the centre of a group of critics, who gloomily shook their big bonnets as they pronounced dubious opinions upon it in Manx.

This crowd formed an excrescence upon a larger one collected in the market-place, and composed of advocates, farmers, fishermen, shopkeepers, and boys. Though not indifferent to the cheap-jack, they were clearly drawn together by some other attraction. While talking, they kept

glancing up Malew Street, and then at the barracks, which presented a very desolate appearance. The windows were wide open; the gates also were open; and there was no sentry. The only military to be seen were the barrack-sergeant and a solitary soldier, who had just arrived with some baggage-carts. In fact, one detachment had gone, and another was momentarily expected.

It would appear as if the excitement had spread to the very bird creation, for the castle walls were lined with sparrows and starlings which had returned in haste from their picnic in the country. Some were noisily discussing their adventures, while others were fighting for dormitories in the ivy below. From the southern tower, a superior company of rooks surveyed these small fry with ineffable disdain. One grey old philosopher, perched

above the clock-bell, with his head cocked on one side, looked as if he were moralising upon the scene beneath.

Precisely at sunset the ensign which had been floating over the castle was lowered from sight. A few minutes later the strains of a fife-and-drum band caused a violent surging in the crowd. The cheap-jack found himself suddenly deserted, and every face was turned towards the mob-beg* pouring along the narrow street. In the midst of this disorderly escort marched the new detachment—fine tall men, most with medals on their breasts, and all bronzed by foreign service. Notwithstanding their ten-mile tramp from Douglas, they stepped out briskly, keeping time to the music played by their little band, and apparently pleased at their reception. The three officers walked behind,

* Little mob : tagrag and bobtail.

talking to the barrack-master, whose duty it was to introduce the company to its new quarters.

Of the new-comers, there was none that attracted so much notice as the senior subaltern, Mr. Fabian Dalrymple. Though there were many stalwart fellows among the fishermen, his immense height made them open their eyes. He was so tall and thin that one of them raised a laugh by likening him to a conger. He had handsome delicate features, a sallow complexion, fair hair, and strongly-marked veins on a high forehead. His curving nostrils seemed to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, for they expanded and contracted continually. It was an intellectual face, but marred by a weak mouth and supercilious expression. As he walked along between these two rows of eager spectators, he looked unutterably bored ; and, when

he turned either to the right or to the left, it was with an air of careless disdain.

While he and his men were advancing along Malew Street, a sedan-chair was being borne along Arbory Street. The two processions emerging upon the market-place at the same time, and almost at the same spot, each became an object of interest to the other. The bearers of the sedan-chair halted to inspect the soldiers as they went by, and the soldiers laughed heartily at a form of conveyance which had long been extinct in England. With all its finery, it was a very old specimen: older than its occupant imagined, for the bottom fell out, and an elderly lady with it. She was fortunate enough to alight on her feet, but even then presented rather a ridiculous sight.

Frank Maddrell happened to be watching the subaltern at that moment, and,

observing his listlessness suddenly change to amusement, followed the direction of his eyes. The unexpected removal of the strain upon the bearers' arms having caused the gaudy old sedan-chair to be jerked up waist-high, Frank saw enough of the distressed lady to recognise her as Mrs. Colquitt, the mother of Mona and Nessie. He sprang forward to rescue her from her ignominious position, but as he did so darted a look of intense indignation at Fabian Dalrymple, who returned it with a cold stare, and then passed on, smiling at some remark made by Captain Nugent.

As the soldiers entered the barrack-yard, the music ceased. The gates closed behind them; the crowd lingered to gaze up at the windows, but, seeing no great novelty in the figures that soon appeared there, gradually melted away; the cheap-jack drove off in disgust; presently, a

corporal's guard marched out to post the sentries ; and so life in Castletown returned to its old groove.

But the incident of the sedan-chair was not so readily forgotten—at any rate, by Frank Maddrell. It gave him an unfavourable impression of Dalrymple : or, rather, strengthened the unfavourable impression he had already formed from his face and manner. It was a hasty thing to do, of course, but that was Frank's way. He was one of those over-sanguine sensitive fellows who are easily thrown out of their stride. His own romantic notions were so deeply ingrained in his nature that he was apt to be a little intolerant, and his future was so bright in his own eyes that when any shadows fell across it, they were very black indeed. Possessing in a high degree the faculty of intuition which has ebbed as reason has flowed, he could detect

their presence even before they became visible. And his present feeling was, that in some way or other the new officer would be a thorn in his side.

This did not prevent him from paying a ceremonious visit to the barracks on Monday afternoon. Captain Nugent and Ensign Middleton having taken lodgings in the hotel close by, the lieutenant had the officers' quarters to himself. He occupied a large square room on the ground-floor, with two windows looking out upon the market-place, and one corner curtained off to form a bed-room. When Frank was shown in by the orderly, he saw that the plain furniture provided by the authorities had been supplemented by a number of camp-chairs, couches, rugs, pretty little tables, and so forth. Some excellent pictures hung on the walls, and many valuable nicknacks were scattered about

with artistic carelessness. It was evident that Lieutenant Dalrymple possessed private means.

He was lounging in an easy-chair near the window, while his long legs required two other chairs to support them. After scanning the card handed to him by his servant, he laid down the book he had been reading, and rose to greet his visitor. The two men shook hands cordially enough ; and yet, when they looked at one another, there was something more in their faces than is usually seen at a first meeting. It was certainly not hostility, the time not having come for that ; perhaps it might be described as languid curiosity in the one case, and reserve in the other, as if both foresaw the possibility of a collision in the future.

‘Take that chair, Mr. Maddrell,’ said Dalrymple, pointing to the one he had

vacated and sitting down opposite. 'I have been holding quite a levée this afternoon. I should think all the men in the town must have called upon me.' He glanced at the mirror, which was framed with cards.

'Then you know everybody by this time?'

'Oh, dear, no: I don't know a soul. They poured in so thick and fast that I can't tell one from another. Now, that ponderous fellow over there'—he coiled his legs under his chair to turn round and point through the window—'who's he, for example?'

'Mr. Clucas, an advocate, my cousin,' replied Frank, coldly.

'Oh, dear, no; I don't mean him,' said Dalrymple, pointing to some one else. 'I mean that oddity over yonder.'

'Mr. Moore, an advocate, also my cousin.'

‘I really think you must be mistaken,’ said Dalrymple, with consummate coolness, though there was a gleam of laughter in his eyes. ‘You appear to be looking too much to the left. I was asking about that great fat fellow with a squint.’

‘That great fat fellow with a squint,’ said Frank, with increased frigidity, ‘is Mr. Quilliam, an advocate, also my cousin.’

‘Why, then,’ said Dalrymple, airily, ‘you all seem to be cousins.’

‘Nearly.’

‘And all advocates?’

‘Nearly.’

‘It really is very funny,’ said Dalrymple, with a lazy laugh. It was anything but polite; and yet an apology would only have made matters worse, as would any fresh attempt to find some one not related to Frank. But, seeing that it would be wise to change the conversation, he added,

‘By-the-by, I have forgotten to ask you what you will drink. There is port, claret, whisky, and beer on the premises; but anything else can be fetched from the hotel.’

‘Thank you, I prefer beer,’ said Frank. It would in those days have been a most unfriendly act to refuse. In obedience to the same laws of hospitality which bade him look upon this stranger as the guest of the town, he had kept his temper, strongly as he had felt the provocation to speak out.

Dalrymple rang the bell, and gave the necessary orders to his servant.

There was an enamelled snuff-box on the little table by his side, and, after offering it to Frank, he took a pinch himself. As he did so, it was impossible not to be reminded of the Scotchman who had ‘grand accommodation.’ Not that

Dalrymple's nose was atrociously large, but it possessed the power of grasping what was offered it, like an elephant's trunk. An active nose, you see, has its uses. But why should it be applied to the face of a remarkably passive individual?

'Jough,' said he, lying back in his chair after his wearisome exertions, 'I believe the country people call beer in their outlandish dialect. A sore throat always pulls me up sharp before I get half-way through the word.'

Frank was so dazed by this calm impertinence, that he made no attempt to defend 'the outlandish dialect.' For once in his life, he was rendered incapable of uttering a single word. When the orderly arrived with the tray, Frank plunged headlong into a glass of beer, in the hope of being able to take a clearer view of the situation afterwards.

‘I like,’ said Dalrymple, with just a suspicion of sarcasm in his tones, ‘coming to a town where one has always somebody to talk to. You Manxmen seem to be a hospitable race, in spite of your inhospitable coast.’

‘Manx hospitality has always been as famous as Manx jough.’

‘Ah! you like jough,’ exclaimed Dalrymple, thinking he saw a chance of drawing out his taciturn visitor. ‘This’—here he drank off a glass—‘is certainly a palatable drink, but, of course, not equal to the noted ales of Burton-on-Trent.’

Much as Frank appreciated candour, he considered the comparison to be both uncalled for and untrue. No beer could rival jough. The productions of England were, from its geographical position, necessarily inferior to those of Manx. Still, he made no reply; he could not trust himself to speak.

Finding himself at fault in this direction also, Dalrymple thought it best to 'try back.'

'It strikes a stranger as very singular,' he said, regarding Frank as if he were a picture hung in rather a bad light, 'that you should all be advocates. Is there any particular reason?'

Frank's face brightened at once and his tongue was unloosed. He forgot his unpleasant questioner in the pleasure of answering the question.

'Yes, there is a little history attached to that,' he said, and then proceeded to unreel it with a fluency that could only have come from practice. 'There once was a time when the Lieutenant-Governor and Deemsters, sitting in the stone sedilia at the castle gate, dispensed justice to all comers "without any frivolous fearing of lawyers."' Before this open-air tribunal,

at which the Keys—our Commons, you know—usually assisted, plaintiff and defendant appeared in person; the Attorney-General was “bound to plead the cause of all orphans and widows, they giving him twopence for his fee;” and every case was determined on the fourth court-day at the latest—“so speedy,” writes Sacheverell, “is the justice of this nation, of which perhaps the world hath not a parallel.” But this state of affairs was not without its drawbacks. I dare say you know that when medicine can be obtained without expense, healthy people will consume it in vast quantities. Similarly, the ease and cheapness with which grievances could be redressed, bred a spirit of litigation. Left to itself, it would probably have died a natural death when laws multiplied and became incomprehensible, but the frauds—I am speaking of a

time before the island passed to the Crown—continually practised upon the nation by fugitives from English justice, served to keep it alive. Then sprang up a race of “hedge-lawyers,” ignorant quacks, who have been gradually superseded by regular advocates, duly licensed by the Lieutenant-Governor. Yes, I suppose there are a good many of us. Perhaps,’ added he, with a smile, ‘that is why the simple faith of the Manx peasant in the efficacy of the law is not quite so strong as it used to be.’

When Frank began to speak, Dalrymple had just taken a pinch of snuff between his fingers, but the change in his visitor was so remarkable that his hand paused in the air. It was some little time before he felt able to administer the dose to his nose, which was waiting motionless to receive it.

He watched Frank’s face at first with

astonishment and afterwards with critical curiosity. This odd young man, he admitted, had found something to talk about, after all.

‘I am a bit of a painter, Mr. Maddrell,’ said he, indicating the pictures on the walls generally; ‘and some day, if you will allow me, I should like to sketch you while talking about the island. You are a little hard on your profession, aren’t you?’

Frank smilingly replied, in his outspoken way,

‘Well, you see, I have no clients.’

‘And the other advocates?’ laughed Dalrymple.

‘Are, many of them, in the same boat.’

Thus it came about that the two men parted on better terms than might have been anticipated. At the same time, when Frank left the barracks, his presenti-

ment of coming danger was still strong upon him. If he knew not in which direction to look for it, he felt that Dalrymple not only was his superior in some respects, but also possessed the power of making himself intensely disagreeable: all the more so because he appeared quite unconscious of the effect he was producing. Frank was also partly aware of the fact that when his own temper was ruffled, he showed as many objectionable points as a hedgehog. So there would be numberless opportunities for friction.

CHAPTER IV.

MILITARY TACTICS.

SHORTLY after Frank's departure, Captain Nugent strolled into Dalrymple's quarters and took a seat by the window.

He was a short, thick-set man, with a good-humoured, ruddy face, keen, twinkling eyes, and grizzled hair. By some brilliant act in the field, he had gained his promotion from the ranks, a thing not so easy to do then as it is now. As a soldier, he was a strict disciplinarian ; as a private individual, the very opposite, especially with those of better family than himself.

‘I’m precious glad to get out of my own quarters,’ he said, lighting a cigar. ‘I’ve been receiving visitors four deep.’

‘So have I,’ said Dalrymple, with a yawn. ‘But the most curious specimen of the choleric islander has just left me. I have been probing him to see what he is made of.’

‘Why?’

‘Goodness knows. I don’t.’

‘Didn’t you find it fatiguing?’

‘Well, yes. But in a way he interested me. I don’t know why, and I can’t say I care, but he hates me like poison. I’ll tell you who he is—the young fellow we met yesterday with that sweet little mermaid.’

‘Ah!’

‘Nugent, I’m going to marry the mermaid.’

‘Why?’ asked the captain, with a laugh.

‘What a man you are to bother about

reasons ! Really, I scarcely know. Perhaps I have taken a fancy to her, for one thing ; and for another, I believe the choleric islander is bent on marrying her. But, by George, I'll stop him.'

'I never know,' said the captain, taking the cigar out of his mouth to stare at his friend lounging in the easy-chair opposite, 'whether you are in earnest or not. You are a strange fellow, Dalrymple. What fun can there be in such a thing?'

Dalrymple sat up and tapped him on the knee.

'Listen to me, Nugent !' he said, speaking with great deliberation. 'I drifted into the world ; I have drifted through the world ; and at the present rate I shall drift out of the world—at the double if we are long quartered in this hole. I'm in no hurry to go ; I never was in a hurry to do anything ; and as I have never had a pur-

pose in my life, I intend to try the effect now. What do you think of that for a novelty? I am going to run a race against the choleric islander, and the prize is to be the hand of Miss Nessie Colquitt. So no poaching, remember.'

It may appear singular that a man who had hitherto been extremely deficient in energy should now develop it simply to defeat energy in another. But the most ubiquitous beast in the world, and perhaps the most dangerous, is the dog-in-the-manger. That Dalrymple had firmly resolved to spare no effort to marry a girl whom he had scarcely seen could not be supposed for a moment; but it suited him to say so. There were a few persons, Captain Nugent among the number, whom he liked to think well of him, and, when he thought at all, he liked to think well of himself. In sober truth, however, he

did not look beyond the pleasure of flirting with a pretty girl, and the still greater pleasure of irritating a rival. How much further he might be drawn by circumstances, he did not trouble to inquire.

The month of August was excellently adapted to his purpose. A great many dinners, picnics, and suppers were given in honour of the new arrivals; there were innumerable minor gatherings for drinking tea and talking gossip; there were solemn whist-parties for turbaned dames in brocaded silks, and grey-headed men in blue coats with brass buttons; and for their juniors there were merry games of Pope Joan played for mother-of-pearl fish at so much a dozen. In short, the whole town plunged into dissipation. As a natural consequence, the officers were soon on a familiar footing with everybody.

If Fabian Dalrymple gained the sincere

hatred of most of the men who detested him the more for his indifference to their opinions, he certainly became a great favourite with the ladies. They called his face aristocratic, his figure majestic, his indolence well-bred ease, and his voice—for singing was one of his many accomplishments—a treasure. When he subscribed towards the purchase of some new herring-nets for a boat's crew that had lost its old ones, it was unparalleled generosity, and when he spoke slightly of an absent person, it was delicate sarcasm.

In their eyes, he had not a single fault. They regarded him as an ideal soldier, a graceful ornament in a drawing-room, and no doubt a very lion in the field; and—here perhaps we get to the root of the matter—he paid them compliments with delightful ease. Most outrageous compliments many of them, but apparently none

the less acceptable. To Mrs. Colquitt he remarked upon the striking resemblance between her and her younger daughter, and ever afterwards this stout, red-faced lady praised his perception.

It was not surprising, then, that Dalrymple's attentions to Nessie should meet with no obstacle in that quarter; and, as for herself, she was but a child in his hands. Under cover of his attitude towards the fair sex generally, he could carry out his manœuvres without much fear of detection. Even if he had devoted himself to her more exclusively than he did, many would have ascribed it to his chivalrous instincts.

While he was guarding her as jealously as a family jewel, if not by his actual presence, at least by his manner towards anyone who ventured to approach her, she, secure in her innocent simplicity, had

not the least suspicion of his intentions. Nessie was always so willing to hear others talk about themselves, so ready to enter into their views, and he had so many new things to tell her about and such a taking way of telling them, that it would have been strange had she not found his society pleasant. But after a time she saw with vague alarm that her old friends were falling away from her. Had she done anything to offend them? she wondered. Or, did they think her ridiculous with this immense young officer beside whom she must look so absurdly small? Though there was but little vanity in Nessie, yet, as this idea grew upon her, the hazel eyes often timidly sought the face of one who had begun to hold aloof. Not a trace of merriment there: so what could be the matter? While the old ladies were whispering behind their fans that a tall

man was certain to marry a tiny wife, Nessie was still in the greatest bewilderment.

Ned Christorey, who gazed at her with wistful sadness almost by the hour, thought his last hope had vanished. True, he could not detect anything to show that she regarded the new arrival as otherwise than a friend; but, with a lover's instinct, he saw that if her present state of isolation should continue, it must be fatal to his own chances of happiness. If she were happy and contented, he would not complain; but was she? In order to find out, he watched her unceasingly. There were times—times that sent a delicious thrill through his veins—when he fancied she wished him to come to her side; and then he always went, patiently enduring for her sake Dalrymple's scorn, which was so shown as to be unseen by her.

There was at least one other person affected by the new order of things, and that was Frank Maddrell. When Dalrymple discovered that Frank wished to marry Nessie, Frank had not made the discovery himself. Like Ned, he had been her playmate in childhood and her frequent companion afterwards: she had always been his favourite; but it was Dalrymple who taught him how widely his feelings for her differed from his feelings for his other girl friends. He learned then that he was madly in love with her; and was miserable in consequence. He would have been still more miserable had he known that his happiness was only possible at the expense of poor Ned's.

But it was quite enough that Frank's presentiment had been realized. Henceforth, he and Dalrymple must meet as rivals. Chafing at his own inferiority in

coolness, he made several desperate attempts to break through the barrier that was slowly but surely rising round Nessie, but in this he was scarcely successful. Besides being angry, he was dismayed to find himself being gradually pushed into the back-ground, yet in such a calm policeman-like way that he could offer neither opposition nor remonstrance. Elbowed out of the conversation which was carefully kept upon topics of which he was ignorant, he very seldom got a chance of shining in Nessie's presence; and when he did, Dalrymple's steady gaze seemed to be saying, 'Stand aside there! Now then, young fellow, stand aside! Great heavens, don't you see I am waiting!'

In time this treatment broke Frank's resolution, and he retired into sullen gloom from which he glared out upon the man who had driven him into it. It was a most

unwise thing to do, but not unnatural. His conduct needing some justification, he tried to persuade himself that he was holding aloof from rivalry with this impudent fellow—in fact, taking up a position of dignified reserve.

And now, who could be better qualified to charm him back into a brighter mood than Diana Knighton? Often, in some crowded drawing-room, when she saw Frank standing in the background, his eyes angrily fixed upon Dalrymple bending over Nessie's chair, she would slip away from her many admirers, and talk to him as only she knew how to talk. Though she had been laughing with the gayest of the gay a moment before, there was not a trace of merriment about her now, only a tender sympathy that made her beautiful face look almost angelic. If, as was sometimes the case, she found

him extremely obstinate, she, nevertheless, persevered ; and, step by step, picking her way with wonderful tact and patience, led him back to cheerfulness. With her brilliant eyes smiling at him from beneath their long dark lashes, and her sweet voice murmuring in his ears, he would have been less than human had he not smiled back at her. To most men, though she never stayed long enough to afford others an excuse for jealousy, it would have been a delicious dream whose fragrance must have lasted a life-time. But the very instant she left Frank, the clouds were back on his forehead, and, like a magnet when some disturbing influence has been removed, he returned to his pole. When she noticed the change—and it was never once lost upon her—she seldom failed to give expression to her feelings by rapping some unfortunate smartly over the

knuckles. What woman likes to see that her power is but transient?

Sometimes, but not often, Diana engaged in a flirtation with Dalrymple. When she did, it was with a reckless gaiety so foreign to her ordinary manner, that the unmarried members of her own sex unanimously pronounced her to be 'a horrid, designing widow.' Did she find a pleasure in showing that, if she chose, she could bring Dalrymple also to her feet? Perhaps so. There are some to whom pleasure is a mere matter of arithmetic; they can never rest unless they are upon the war-path, and one scalp to them is as good as another—they all count. But as Diana glanced furtively at Frank, as if to mark the effect upon him, and beheld the light once more stealing into his handsome face, there assuredly was not a particle of pleasure in hers.

There was something very like pain—the frenzy of pain that takes a strange delight in self-torture. On such nights, it was a very impatient, silent woman that wearily dragged herself back to her home in the market-place; it was an almost hopeless woman that, in a passion of grief, went to her bed; and yet this was the same as the proud, beautiful, stately woman who came forth again in the morning, smiling, as young men and old men gathered eagerly around her.

Towards the end of the month, a picnic at Langness brought matters to a crisis. The spot selected was a pebbly little creek surrounded by masses of red conglomerate, which formed a marked contrast to the bristling grey schist on the outside of the promontory, as we shall see on a very different occasion. Some walked or drove round by the racecourse, but the majority

went in boats across the bay. After landing at the creek, they passed through a fine, natural arch in the solid rock, claret-coloured slate below, and conglomerate above, with a blaze of gorse on the top; and thus entered a small hollow in the grassy plateau which overlooked the bay. A more cosy nook for a picnic could scarcely be imagined.

Dalrymple had wanted to send a squad of soldiers to do what work was necessary, but the others had overruled him. It was ever so much nicer, they declared, to wait upon themselves; indeed, that was half the fun of the thing. And it was astonishing how much fun the young people got out of lighting fires, unpacking hampers, and laying table-cloths. More than one bashful young man discovered on that sunny afternoon that, if a missing salt-cellar was

a capital subject for a joke, a salad-bowl was a short cut to love-making.

While the preparations were in progress, Ned and Frank kept closely to Nessie's side and were assiduous in helping her. Dalrymple, seated among the dowagers, made no attempt to interfere. But, as soon as the meal was ready, he induced Nessie to sit on his rug, where his sprawling legs prevented anyone from getting near her. Frank was simply furious; not even Diana's soft words could soothe him. Afterwards, when the party broke up into couples, he determined to remain behind by himself, but, seeing Ned looking equally dejected, joined him. And so these two friends, both miserable, both suitors for Nessie's hand, and each ignorant of the other's feelings, clubbed their misery and went off together.

For those who could abandon themselves to the pleasure of the moment, the most enjoyable part of the picnic was the sail home in the evening. The shore lay in a dark semi-circle on the edge of the moonlit water; the mountains stood in a serried row behind; and a rugged coast stretched from the Stack to the bluff headlands near the Calf. Except for the crisp sound of the glistening sea or the plaintive cry of a curlew, there was silence in the bay, until there crept into it the procession of returning boats, some sailing and others rowing, and all laden with happiness, if the songs of merry voices be any criterion.

With Diana as chaperon, many of the young people had crowded into a good-sized open boat, rigged as a yawl, partly decked forward and with a large counter aft. Frank and Ned, who formed the crew, stood by the mast. The breeze not being

very strong, they had abandoned the tiller to Diana, who was a born sailor.

If she had wished to contrast her own queenly beauty with the child-like prettiness of Nessie, who sat by her feet, she could not have chosen a more favourable opportunity. She had never looked more lovely than she did then, sitting alone on the counter, her graceful figure outlined against the starry sky, and her cheeks flushed with pleasurable excitement as the boat heeled to the breeze until the gurgling water was flush with the gunwale. Utterly fearless herself, she laughed merrily whenever a shower of spray raised a chorus of screams. While singing to them some of the old Manx ballads, she nevertheless contrived to watch the darkening surface of the sea for a squall, and Frank's face, which plainly showed that a squall had already come.

He, poor fellow, could do nothing but surfeit himself with misery, never taking his eyes off Dalrymple, who was doing his utmost to amuse ostensibly the whole party, but really Nessie. Frank made up his mind that, come what might, there should be an end to this. Much as he would have liked to prepare her for what he had to say, he must now go at it headforemost, to win or lose as the event should decide.

When he went to bed that night, he was fully determined to speak to her next day. And when he rose in the morning, it was with increased hopefulness arising out of that determination. He had a commission to execute for his uncle, which took him some time. That done, he started for Claddagh House.

As he passed the barracks, part of Dalrymple was hanging out of the window, the rest of him being inside with Captain

Nugent, who was smoking as usual. Dalrymple waited until Frank had gone by, and then completely entered the room.

‘Nugent,’ he said, smiling, ‘this grows exciting. There goes the choleric islander to visit my pretty mermaid. As sure as eggs, I can see a proposal in the fellow’s eye.’

‘Well?’ said the captain, who had become deeply interested in the situation, though all its complications were not yet revealed to him.

‘The choleric islander has the start of me, after all. But—’ he stopped to take a leisurely pinch of snuff—‘the first off, remember, is not always the first in at the finish.’

Nugent smoked on thoughtfully for a while, before he said, ‘I wish, Dalrymple, you would oblige me and give up this absurd affair.’

‘Impossible, my dear fellow, utterly impossible. Now that I am entered for the Manx handicap, I consider it a point of honour not to scratch.’

‘Then I shall be glad to see you unplaced.’

CHAPTER V.

ENGAGED.

IN a garden where sweetwilliams, hollyhocks, cabbage-roses, rosemary and thyme grew side by side, and bent old apple-trees stretched out their shrivelled arms to grasp the sunbeams that fell around them in threads of gossamer, an elderly gentleman was performing some extraordinary antics.

He was a wizened little sharp-featured man, with small timid eyes set closely in a skin like parchment. His head would have been quite bald but for a patch of grey hair around each ear, which gave him

rather an owlish appearance. He carried a small metal-box in one hand, and in the other a shrimping-net which he flourished in the air. Thus equipped, he bounded wildly over the flower-beds as if his life depended upon his spasmodic activity. Sometimes pausing in his erratic career to wipe his forehead with a red handkerchief, and sometimes moderating his pace to a stealthy creep, he swooped with savage eagerness upon one spot after another; then gazing ruefully around, started off again with renewed vigour.

When he had made nearly a complete circuit of the garden which was of considerable size, he and the net dropped upon a bed of thyme almost simultaneously, and, instead of rising to dart off again, remained there. As he peered cautiously into the net, he looked more like an owl than ever, his face was so wrinkled. But

the next moment it glowed with triumph—he had secured his prey, a butterfly!

After some time spent in gloating over the fluttering insect, the metal-box was brought into use. When opened, it was seen to contain a false bottom perforated with holes through which came the pungent odour of ammonia. To this prison the butterfly was carefully transferred, and its struggles ceased almost with the closing of the lid. Query: Is there not one thing for which we forget to be thankful—that there is no race of superior beings anxious to impale us for future reference or stifle us in the interests of science?

A wooden-legged gardener who had been watching his master's proceedings with a broad grin, now stumped upon the scene. Cain the Leg, as he was commonly called, reminded one of the old pictures of the sun, for his ruddy mottled face was en-

circled by a fringe of ruddier hair, each ray going straight towards its own particular point of the compass.

‘Caught him, sir?’ he asked.

Mr. Colquitt tapped his box with profound satisfaction.

‘Ay, he’s in there, is he!’ said Cain the Leg, attentively studying the lid. ‘Safe enough, I reckon.’

‘Yes, safe enough, Cain. A beautiful specimen.’

‘That’s good, very. You’ve had a lot of bother about him, though. Now,’ added Cain the Leg who was athirst for information when it could be obtained without trouble, ‘what may he be called?’

‘A peacock.’

‘A peacock! That’s sing’lar, too. An’ what may he be worth, sir, when you’ve got him stuffed?’

‘Its value,’ replied Mr. Colquitt with a

touch of loftiness, 'is not to be calculated in money. I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have collected all my specimens myself.'

'To be sure,' said Cain the Leg, thoughtfully rubbing his chin and looking a little disappointed at an answer which might have been of some practical importance to himself. 'But what'll Miss Mona say about the thyme, sir? An' if the mistress sees——'

Mr. Colquitt sprang to his feet.

'Smooth it down, Cain,' he said, anxiously regarding the damage he had done. 'Smooth it down, that's a good man. Do it at once, for I must be getting indoors.' And he went off at a funny jog-trot, while Cain the Leg winked slyly after him.

The path, which was bordered on both sides with white pebbles, led to a gate in a

fence. Below, there was a grassy bank laced with creeping plants and thickly sprinkled with the pink flowers of the convolvulus; and, above, a wooden lattice-work hung with ivy. On the other side of the fence stood Claddagh House, the hall-door peeping from a bower of enormous red fuchsias upon a wide gravelled space, in the centre of which was a flower bed surrounding an old apple-tree.

The house was built in two stories, with a very sloping roof and high gables. Black false windows stared vacantly at the little strip of lawn and shrub-like trees on its seaward side, and narrow diamond-paned windows sparkled at the back and in front. Its interior was wonderfully like a quaint old desk, pervaded by the scent of the lavender and roseleaves of some tranquil love-story upon the last scene of which the grave had long closed. While

covering no great extent of ground, it was packed with small low oddly-shaped rooms dovetailing into one another most ingeniously. The woodwork was carved into curious patterns, the cornices were antique, and the passages sinuous. A more desirable residence for a courteous elderly ghost desirous of seclusion could scarcely be imagined. It was a delightful dreamy old place; a derelict floating into the present from some distant past, and laden with a rich cargo of memories of bygone times.

When Mr. Colquitt entered the house, the other members of the family were collected in the sitting-room. The furniture of this room, as of the others, was just what one expected to find there : solid old chairs, a stiff-backed couch, a massive table, a cavernous cupboard with sliding panels, a mahogany bookcase filled with musty books, and a fine sideboard, all

arranged with a certain air of primness, like a circle of ceremonious old friends who would have indignantly resented the intrusion of a stranger.

Mrs. Colquitt and Nessie occupied the couch, the former talking in her own peculiar strain, and the latter tenderly stroking her mother's hair, which showed here and there a trace of silver. Mona, standing at one end of the table, was cutting up material for a dress. And Georgie, a bright lad of fourteen, while preparing some new tackle for his fishing-rod, found enough leisure to play with a Manx tabby which had curled itself up in a patch of sunlight near the window.

'He took a cup of tea,' Mrs. Colquitt was saying in her matter-of-fact way, 'and a bit of toast, and then went upstairs and died. Now, I call that'—she folded her plump hands on her lap and looked round

complacently—‘a very comfortable death.’

‘Another of your horrible tales, mother dear,’ said Mona, smiling as she snipped at her dress.

And Nessie, patting her mother’s ruddy cheek, laughingly exclaimed, ‘Oh, you dear old melancholy beauty!’

Mrs. Colquitt looked hurt at the charges brought against her by her daughters. Nothing in the world could convince her that she was apt to be a little depressing. This portly, well-dressed lady with the round, good-tempered face was altogether an anomaly. By rights, she should have been the very essence of cheerfulness; and yet the one subject of absorbing interest to her was death, and if there was a view more gloomy than another, she was sure to take it.

‘Horrible, Mona!’ she protested. ‘I wonder how you can say such things.’

Now there was Thomas Coole, who kissed his wife, washed his hands at the kitchen sink—she has got the piece of soap still—and then jumped out of the attic window. I remember his funeral well. One never knows whether one's own mayn't be the next, so I watched——'

But Nessie had laid a gentle hand on her mother's mouth.

Before she had removed it, there was a sudden loud rattling of the door-handle; then the door itself was flung open to admit a leg, bent as if it belonged to a person running at full speed; and finally Mr. Colquitt appeared. While closing the door, he turned round and leaned over the handle just as if he were engaged in a confidential *tête-à-tête* with it. This was his usual way of entering a room.

Silently, but with a half-inquiring, half-deprecatory glance at his wife, he shuffled

across the floor to a chair by the side of the grate. Being of a very chilly disposition, he always went as naturally as a chestnut to the hob, and when, as now, there was no fire, it was his habit to get as near as possible to the place where it ought to be. He sat down with his feet on the fender, his knees drawn tightly together, his clasped hands resting upon them, and his whole body so compressed that it looked as if it had been flattened against the wall. Though he pretended to gaze reflectively at the Derbyshire spar in the grate, he knew quite well that his wife was regarding him with suspicion.

‘Maria,’ he ventured to say at last, ‘I have caught a beautiful peacock. Would you like to see it?’ His hand wandered towards his pocket.

‘Indeed I should not,’ replied Mrs.

Colquitt, severely. 'No, Nessie, be quiet; I *will* have my say. I wonder how a man—the father of a family, too—can be so cruel. May I ask, Mr. C., how you would like to be treated as you treat the butterflies?'

He moved uneasily in his chair. While his wife simply revelled in horrors, the very idea of death in connection with himself made him shudder. His pursuit of entomological specimens was but a hobby; his real object in life was—to live.

'We can't compare,' he began.

'Oh! but we can compare,' she said, with decision, 'and, if you have no particular objection, Mr. C., we will. Suppose I were to put you, you cruel, idle man, who never do a single thing to provide bread for your own children—suppose I were to put you in an oven——'

‘Oh, Maria!’ he said, wincing.

‘Yes, in a hot oven,’ she proceeded, sternly, with a nod at him; ‘in an oven so hot that it would bake a loaf in five minutes. Now, how would you like that?’

This interesting speculation was interrupted by Georgie, who, boylike, had been pursuing his own train of reflection.

‘Mona,’ he asked, ‘is it true that there are such things as cats with tails?’

‘Yes; in England, I believe.’

‘How funny they must look!’ laughed Georgie. ‘I wonder where they got their tails.’

As if for the purpose of thinking out this problem more conveniently, he subsided beneath the table. But, after a short silence, he reappeared, roaring with laughter.

‘Look!’ he exclaimed, stuffing his hand-

kerchief into his mouth and pulling it out again. 'Oh, do look at Orry!'

By the aid of a strip of Mona's dress-material, he had improvised a tail for the unfortunate cat, which was so ashamed of its appendage that it took refuge behind the curtain. While Nessie gently reproved her brother for teasing the animal, Mrs. Colquitt improved the occasion by lecturing her husband. This came, she said, of setting an example of cruelty to his children.

'Nonsense, mother dear,' said Mona, in a quiet, authoritative way which disarmed opposition. 'Georgie is no worse than other boys, and a great deal better than most. What is it, Sheval?' she asked, turning towards a gaunt, hard-featured servant who had just entered.

'Miss Nessie,' said Sheval, 'you're wanted downstairs, if you please.'

‘By whom?’ asked Nessie, rising to smooth her ruffled hair at the mirror, and perhaps to hide the colour in her dimpled cheeks.

‘A gentleman.’

‘But what’s his name?’

‘He told me,’ answered Sheval, smiling, ‘I wasn’t to give no name.’

Nessie turned round to stare.

‘I know who it is,’ cried Georgie, looking as proud as Punch of his knowledge. ‘It’s Ned Christorey, and he has given you another sovereign, Sheval, like you told me he did before, and that’s the reason you look so pleased. Isn’t that right?’

It would be hard to say whether Nessie or Sheval was the more distressed by this blunt announcement, but the latter was the first to find her tongue.

‘No, you’re wrong, Master Georgie,’ she indignantly replied, fully determined that

never again would she take him into her confidence. 'I don't say it's Mr. Christorey and I don't say it isn't; I don't say who it is, for I was told not.'

A volley of questions failed to move her from this position. Mrs. Colquitt was for holding a council of war whereat the matter might be thoroughly discussed, but Nessie was glad to escape from the room. She was shortly afterwards followed by Georgie, who announced with an air of great importance that he had an engagement with Mr. Maddrell.

An hour passed by before Nessie's return—an hour spent by Mrs. Colquitt in guessing at the name of the mysterious visitor, by her husband in brooding over the grate, and by their more practical daughter in going on with her work. The elder lady was devoured by curiosity; every sound in the hall sent her hurrying

to the window. When she had exhausted her list of acquaintances, she returned to her favourite theme—her husband's deplorable idleness. She raked up numerous precedents to show that it would infallibly kill him in the end: a style of argument that would have had more weight with him had not all the persons she mentioned lived to between eighty and ninety.

Carried away by her own eloquence, she did not hear two voices talking in the hall or Nessie's footstep on the stairs, and, when the door was hastily opened, she was taken by surprise.

With a very flushed face and bright eyes, Nessie almost ran across the room and flung her arms around her mother's neck.

'Oh, mother darling,' she cried, 'I'm so happy.'

'Bless the girl, what's the matter?' ex-

claimed Mrs. Colquitt, for Nessie was sobbing.

‘Frank has asked me—to be his wife—and I’ve promised—if you don’t object.’

‘Frank! Frank Maddrell! On a Friday, too!’

‘Mother dear,’ said Mona, warningly.

‘Nessie,’ added she, leaving her chair to bend down and kiss her sister’s forehead, ‘I’m very, very glad to hear what you have just told us. I hope you may be quite happy; indeed, I’m sure you will be, with Frank.’

‘You dear kind thing!’ murmured Nessie, with a pressure of the hand but without raising her head. ‘And, Mona, you are happy, too, aren’t you?’

‘Yes, darling. Your happiness is also ours.’

‘I fully endorse that,’ said Mr. Col-

quitt, speaking with unusual decision, yet glancing nervously at his wife.

She was fumbling in a great bag—a kind of pocket slung underneath the dress and reached by a slit in the skirt. When she had drawn out half-a-dozen handkerchiefs, some having been used as dusters, she sorted out the cleanest and applied it to her eyes.

‘And you, mother?’ asked Nessie, troubled lest she should have been selfishly enjoying a happiness which the others could not share.

‘Of course,’ replied Mrs. Colquitt, ‘we shall be exceedingly sorry to lose you, my darling, but better this way than another. I am surprised, though; I must say I am surprised.’ With a warm heart and the very best intentions, she had an unfortunate way of trying to promote the welfare

of others by pressing her own opinions upon them, for which reason it seemed a special provision of Nature that her eldest daughter should have been set in authority over her. 'Frank Maddrell!' she went on. 'I felt sure it was to be Mr. Dal——' But at a look from Mona she stopped abruptly and began to caress Nessie.

From this moment the situation changed for the better. Laying aside her nagging propensities, she exerted herself to please: an effort that Nessie, who knew 'the melancholy old beauty' so well, could appreciate at its true value. If tears would steal into the mother's eyes every now and again, she brushed them away, and when a congenial horror presented itself, resolutely passed it by. Mr. Colquitt had to kiss and congratulate his pretty daughter, who would not allow him to return to his solitary chair, but

insisted upon his sitting by her side. She also made Mona take the buffet at her feet; and thus arranged, the family fell to discussing plans for the future.

Owing to the intimate relations between all persons concerned, there had been a great deal of mystery about Nessie's lovers. Mrs. Colquitt had, as she said, supposed Fabrian Dalrymple to be the favoured suitor, and Mona, though wise enough to keep her opinion to herself, had always regarded Ned Christorey in that light. As we shall now see, there was at least one other person who thought the same.

CHAPTER VI.

A DOMESTIC SCENE.

WHILE one of Nessie's lovers was bringing his suit to a successful issue, another was trying to decide upon a course of action. Was he to accept her answer as final, or not? Would it distress her if he were to try again? These were difficult questions for Ned, who had only his honest heart and dull intellect to guide him.

He was sitting with his mother in a cheerful room with French windows, which opened upon a lawn set with

flower-beds. No disorderly daisy ventured to show itself in the orderly grass; the shrubs in the background stood shoulder to shoulder like a regiment of soldiers, a resemblance heightened by the regularity of the trees behind: everything denoted the greatest care and precision. The only incongruous element in the scene was Toby with his one ear and stumpy tail. If he had possessed any notion of the 'fitness of things,' he would certainly have slunk away to some dark corner, instead of stretching his shaggy body at full length upon the lawn.

After surveying the garden, one instinctively turned to Mrs. Christorey, in order to ascertain whether she was responsible for the prevailing air of stiffness. A single glance was sufficient to set this idea at rest. The sunlight, streaming through the open window, fell

in a golden shower upon a slender, gentle, grey-haired lady sitting in a low basket chair. She had a singularly sweet but rather sad expression, which alone redeemed her from the reproach of plainness. But in her son's opinion she was the most beautiful woman in the world except Nessie. She wore a dainty lace cap and a silver-grey dress ruffled at the neck and wrists. As she bent over her fancy-work, she sometimes raised her pensive face to steal an anxious look at Ned, who was pretending to read the *Manx Mercury*.

Presently he rose from his seat, and Toby, hearing his master's footsteps, rose also, yawned, stretched himself, and came and looked inquiringly in at the window.

'Going out, Ned?' asked Mrs. Christorey.

‘Yes, I have business, mother.’

‘Business!’ she repeated, with an incredulous smile. Unfortunately, it had been ordained that he should do nothing but potter about the property and wait for his father’s shoes. At no time had this want of occupation weighed more heavily upon him than it did now, for there was nothing to distract his thoughts from his trouble.

‘Is it important?’

‘What a dear old inquisitive mother it is!’ laughed Ned, laying his hands upon her shoulders and looking fondly into her thoughtful face. ‘We ought to have an office here for investigating and controlling the affairs of Castletown. If they ever make me a Key—and it’s to be hoped for the honour and glory of the island, that they’ll do so soon—I shall certainly bring in a bill to that effect.’

‘I’m glad,’ she said, smiling back at him, ‘to hear my gloomy son laugh.’

‘Gloomy!’ he exclaimed, changing colour, but continuing in the same light strain. ‘What a dreadful thing to say of a young man who has so much to do!’

‘But it’s true. There has lately been something the matter, Ned—something that you have been trying to hide even from your mother. Eh, my boy?’

‘Well, mother, suppose it is so. You know I have some good reason for my silence.’

As he spoke he stood up and turned away his head, lest his secret should be wrung from him in spite of himself.

‘I know more than that, Ned,’ said she, her eyes glistening with motherly pride. ‘I know you are keeping silent because you are afraid of worrying me. Oh, fie! my son. Will you deny me a mother’s

privilege of doing what little she can to help her bashful son. Believe me, Ned, it is a sweet privilege.'

'You sweetest and best of mothers!' said Ned, huskily, bending low over her.

'If you only knew your father as well as I do——'

'And pray, madam, what then?'

The speaker, who had just stepped in through the window, was a middle-sized, brittle-looking man with only one arm, the other sleeve being padded and sewn to his side. He spoke and moved so stiffly as to suggest a fear lest he should break—lose another arm or a leg. He was carefully dressed, and his grizzled hair was as neat as the rest of his person. It was Major Christorey himself, once of His Majesty's service, afterwards of the Manx Fencibles, and now a prominent member of the House of Keys and a landed proprietor.

‘Sit down, Reginald,’ said his wife, quietly.

But he turned to Ned and asked :

‘What is the meaning of this tomfoolery between you and the Claddagh House people?’

‘I don’t understand you, sir.’

‘I hear you are always there. Is it true? The High Bailiff casually stated the fact without comment, but of course it’s town talk.’

‘People forget, Reginald,’ said his wife, in the same gentle way, ‘that to state a fact is also to comment upon it, for no one can be so certain or so unbiassed as to state it quite correctly.’

‘Stuff!’ said the major. ‘Emphatically stuff! Either Ned is in the habit of spending most of his time at Claddagh House, or he isn’t. Which is it?’ He turned stiffly to frown at his son.

‘I certainly don’t spend most of my time there,’ replied Ned, with regret; ‘nor do I go there as often as I used to do.’

‘Surely,’ said Mrs. Christorey, ‘there couldn’t be a nicer family than the Colquitts.’

‘That may be,’ said the brittle major, taking a careful seat; ‘but I wish to prevent complications, and in these matters’—as a military man, he felt and looked rather proud of his foresight—‘one can never be too early in the field. The thing must be stopped at once; I have other views for Ned.’

‘I must beg of you, sir,’ said Ned, submissively, ‘not to prohibit my going to Claddagh House.’

The major’s eyebrows were strangely arched as he snapped out, ‘Why?’

‘Because,’ replied Ned, firmly, but still

respectfully, 'I should be very grieved to disobey you.'

This was an astonishing speech from Ned the Patient. But, as his father knew, he could also be Ned the Stubborn. There was a good deal of momentum in this slow, heavy fellow, when once he was set going, and, should it come to a collision between him and the brittle major, there could be no question as to which would suffer the most damage. It was the first time that Ned had shown the slightest impatience against the paternal authority, which was just as stringent in his manhood as it had been in his boyhood. Had he not been enlightened by his love for Nessie, he might still have remained ignorant that his responsibilities were increasing with his years—that, having arrived at an age when he was able to think for himself, he would be held answerable for his acts,

even though they were dictated by his father. Unfortunately, this is a side of the question that parents usually ignore, forgetting that they are committing a gross injustice in issuing commands, for the consequences of which they cannot, except in a very minor degree, become responsible. Friendly advice is quite another matter, but this is what Ned had never yet got from his father.

The latter was gazing in speechless astonishment at his son, whose respectful attitude gave no indication of the rebel. It was a perilous situation, for a hasty word might have shattered the happiness of a family, and only the soldier held in check the outraged parent. Having given a command that Ned refused to obey, Major Christorey was dismayed to find himself in a *cul-de-sac*. This strategic blunder, though anything but soothing to his

temper, appealed strongly to his military caution, and, knowing the folly of threatening what he could not enforce, he had no wish to court disaster in that direction. Still, what was he to do? To withdraw his command would be to ensure a loss of the prestige by which alone, as he was now compelled to admit, his power was upheld; so that he had to extricate himself by some other method. He stroked his chin, and, with an air of surprise, turned to his wife.

Knowing him well, feeling quite sure that he would shrink from violent measures which could only result in general misery, she had been preparing herself for this, but, like a woman, spoke as if on the spur of the moment.

‘Reginald,’ she said, softly, as she clasped her hands over her fancy-work, to gaze at him, and yet, as it seemed, beyond him,

‘do you remember a beautiful summer morning twenty-five years ago, when a young, warm-hearted soldier, wandering along the banks of the Silverburn, happened to meet a certain young lady, without gloves and in a shabby blue dress of which she was dreadfully ashamed? Not expecting to be seen by anybody, she had gone there to gather forget-me-nots. She was carrying a bunch of them at the time, and he asked her if he might have just one. And when, blushing at her untidy appearance, yet with a strange, new happiness at his request, she gave him one of the little blue flowers, he raised it to his lips. As she stood there trembling, not because of the sleepy, staring cows knee-deep in the water close by, but because of something, she scarcely knew what, in his face, and looks, and words, he took her gloveless hand—nail-bitten, I’m afraid—

and told her of his love. Do you remember that, Reginald?’

‘I do,’ answered the major, in a strangely quiet voice for him.

Besides the deeper feelings aroused by her words, his face showed that he was puzzled as to what she was leading up to. This perplexity was evidently shared by Ned.

‘And then,’ continued Mrs. Christorey, with a pensive smile, ‘he drew her to a mossy bank where the gorse formed a little nook on the edge of the stream, and they both sat down side by side, at first scarcely speaking for very happiness, and afterwards building delightful castles in which their lives were to be spent together. It was a lovely summer day, a pretty dream. She had forgotten all about her shabby blue dress and gloveless hands, she was so

intent upon those bright pictures, though sometimes she wondered what she had done to deserve such a wealth of love as he offered her. Neither of them saw the dark cloud that was coming upon them, yet it came that same afternoon. When he told his parents what had happened, his father, sitting in this very room, perhaps in that very chair, angrily declared that no son of his should marry the untidy girl in the shabby blue dress. The young soldier, he said, must give her up at once. Do you remember that, Reginald ?

‘I do,’ answered the major. ‘And I replied, I’d be hanged if I would.’

‘That was just like you, Reginald,’ said his wife, smiling, though a tear fell upon her clasped hands.

‘I should have been a pitiful cur if I had said anything else.’

‘But it led to many heart-burnings, and the quarrel was long and bitter. Do you still think you acted rightly?’

‘Most decidedly,’ replied her husband, whose opinions were of no gelatinous order. Indeed he was in the habit of dealing out hard case-shot to everybody alike.

‘You have never repented? Not a little bit?’

‘I hope my wife has no need to ask that,’ answered the major, stiffly.

A man would have shrunk from doing what this gentle lady did; he would have argued the matter out with his wife in private. It was a thoroughly womanly stratagem that Mrs. Christorey employed, compromising her husband in the hope of ensuring peace and happiness for both. But while she was a mother, she was also wife enough to provide a way of escape for her husband without any loss of his

dignity, and this she had reserved for her climax.

‘And now, Reginald,’ she concluded, ‘I’m quite sure you don’t wish to imitate the only thing you condemn in your own father. Think of that far-away summer morning, and then think of Ned and dear sweet pretty little Nessie.’

‘Ha!’ exclaimed the major, with a start. Then he stared hard at Ned, who was equally surprised and not a little embarrassed at this unexpected turn. ‘It’s Nessie, is it? I thought it was Mona. This is indeed a conspiracy. So Ned has had the impudence to fall in love without telling me?’

‘Or me,’ added Mrs. Christorey.

‘That’s quite a different matter,’ said the major, pleased that no preference had been shown his wife. ‘Well, Ned, if you wish to marry Nessie, go and do it, but let

there be no more bungling, sir.' A few minutes later, when alone with his wife, he asked, 'Did you know I was thinking of Mona?'

'I guessed it.'

'How could I think otherwise when that conceited ass Dalrymple is always dangling about Nessie?'

'But she doesn't care for him, I feel sure.'

'Then why doesn't she send him about his business?' He rose from his chair and paced thoughtfully to and fro for a time. 'The lad is sly,' he said at length, 'uncommonly sly. There's more in him than I thought. Will he win, do you think?'

'Can you, his father, doubt it?' asked Mrs. Christorey with gentle reproof.

Ah! there lay the secret of her mistake. What girl could have the heart to refuse *her* son? Trouble with the self-willed

father she had foreseen, boldly grappled with, and overcome; after that, she had supposed that all would be plain straightforward sailing. So the affection of the mother misled the intuition of the woman.

Meanwhile Ned was striding through the town like a madman. He could never tell what he had replied to his father or how he had escaped from the room, he was at once so delighted and so distressed. Delighted because one of the formidable obstacles in his path had been swept away; distressed because, if he failed again, that failure could no longer be concealed from his mother, who would suffer scarcely less than himself. As he laboured under the painful idea that his secret was legibly written in his face, he was not in the least surprised that she should have read it, but he could not understand how she had come to make the mistake she did.

This mistake precipitated matters, for Ned felt impelled to act immediately. But instead of going direct to Nessie, he resolved to make a confidant of his clever young friend, Frank Maddrell. Arrived at this resolution, he began to take courage, and his spirits rose with the exertion of carrying it out. As he proceeded, walking and thinking, matters gradually assumed a different aspect; in the partial success which his mother had won for him, he saw an augury of his final triumph.

‘Toby, you ugly villain,’ he cried to his shaggy companion, who was always called the worst names when his master was in the best humour, ‘was there ever such a sweet mother as mine, bless her! And that father of mine is a rare good old fellow too when one can get beneath the surface. Toby, had you such parents, you rascal?’

Poor old blundering Ned, how different would have been his feelings had he known that he was going to take counsel with Nessie's accepted lover! A terrible blow it would have been at any time, but here he was gaily marching to hear his doom from the lips of his successful rival. Happy and hopeful in his ignorance he swung along the narrow streets, deserted by all but a few shopkeepers who stood at their doors and touched their hats to him as he went by. As he neared his goal he instinctively quickened his pace.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RING.

FRANK, being an orphan, lived with his uncle Jacob Maddrell, a bachelor of three score years and ten, who occupied a rambling old house near the quay. It was far too big for him : as if a tiny soldier-crab had taken possession of a huge shell and, settling itself in a corner, absurdly supposed it filled the whole. But Jacob Maddrell was a thorough-paced Manxman, and the house had been his father's home, wherefore he clung to it with extraordinary tenacity and was very careful to keep it

much as he had found it, no better and no worse.

It was chiefly tenanted by rats, not insipid English rats, but enormous long-tailed black rats which had taken passage in Norwegian timber-ships, landed in the harbour, used the drains as their main thoroughfares and so entered the house. They seemed to follow naturally enough in the footsteps of the Norse robbers who used to hammer at the Castle gates until molten lead poured upon their heads made them return sadder and wiser men to their ships; only there was no such easy way of getting rid of their long-tailed followers. There was a large yard at the back where they held high carnival in broad daylight, and never a cat would venture among those gleaming fangs. Many and many a time were the servants obliged to flee to the kitchen-table and shout lustily from that

insular refuge until their master came, smiling, to drive away some monstrous creature, or, more often, to find no trace of it. Jacob Maddrell did not exactly love the rats, but he bore them no ill-will. As they had existed in his father's time, they might remain until they chose to go.

He was a pleasant amiable old gentleman with very handsome features, deeply furrowed though they were now. It was hard to imagine his pale blue eyes lighting up with passion ; if they had ever done so it was before his nephew could remember. He had long snowy hair, and, unlike the rest of his fellow-townsmen at this period, a beard, long white and so silky that anybody could see it had never been cut. This was one of his many hobbies, which are as necessary to old bachelors as cats to old maids.

When Frank left Claddagh House, his

uncle was sitting in his dark old-fashioned room with a cabinet of coins in front of him, and Georgie Colquitt by his side.

The Island having, from the remotest ages down to comparatively recent times, been the battleground of the northern nations when they wanted to fight without endangering their own territories, those Manxmen who had money lived in a chronic state of burying it. In consequence, coins are being continually turned up by the plough or spade. Many a good collection has been made there, but few better than Jacob Maddrell's.

He showed it with child-like pride, and went as minutely into the history of his treasures as if Georgie had been a man. While the boy watched and listened with wonder-filled eyes which sparkled with eagerness as some tray of gold coins came into view, the old man laughed delightedly

at what was to him the sweetest, because the sincerest form of praise. But presently it occurred to him that he was doing rather a selfish thing; it was, he felt, like dangling forbidden fruit before the boy. So, not without a sigh, he selected one of his duplicates and closed the cabinet.

‘Would you like this?’ he asked, holding up the coin.

‘Ra-a-ther!’

‘Well, you shall have it on one condition: that you promise me never to shave.’

After recovering from the shock, Georgie began to giggle.

‘I’ve got nothing to shave,’ he said.

‘So I see,’ returned the old man, with a smile. Then he became grave again, and, stroking his long white beard, proceeded: ‘But time will remedy that. When you grow older, my boy, you will have as much

hair as I have—if you'll leave it alone. 'And this is what I want you to promise. Do you think, Georgie, that you would be given hair merely for the purpose of cutting it off? It's a sin—a positive crime to refuse the gifts of Providence.'

It may be urged that Jacob Maddrell, to be consistent, should also have allowed his nails to grow unchecked. And so he did. His nails were like talons, a curious termination to an exceedingly mild and genial old gentleman, although somewhat given to proselytising.

Boy-like, Georgie proceeded to argue the point. 'But my father shaves, Mr. Maddrell,' he said, thoughtfully. 'Is he committing a sin?'

'Ahem! Of course he's acting according to his judgment, but——'

While he hesitated, a double interruption occurred to extricate him from his

dilemma. One was a succession of screams from the kitchen, and the other the entrance of Frank. Georgie, with his precious coin in his pocket, was immediately despatched to relieve the garrison, and armed with the poker, he marched off boldly to attack the rats which had presumably been the cause of the disturbance. Then Frank made his announcement.

‘Uncle,’ he said, glowing with triumph, ‘I have won the dearest, sweetest, prettiest girl in the world.’

‘Then she shall come and live here. I’ll move up to the top floor. It will do well enough for the few years that remain to me.’

‘What, you don’t ask her name!’

‘Nessie Colquitt,’ said his uncle, with a sly look and a chuckle.

‘How did you find out?’ demanded

Frank, astonished that this simple-minded old bachelor should know what others had failed to guess.

‘By keeping my eyes open. And let me tell you, Frank, that I consider you an exceedingly lucky fellow.’

‘And so I am,’ replied Frank, warmly, shaking his uncle’s hand, ‘and so I am.’

‘And now you’ll want some more money.’

‘Indeed, no ; not another penny beyond what I can earn for myself. You allow me more than you can afford, as it is.’

‘Nonsense, nonsense! You must have money ; young couples can’t live on love and air. You’ll want to give Nessie a handsome present. I’m not very well up in these affairs myself, but I believe that’s always the first thing. Here,’—he held out a number of Manx one-pound notes—‘this will do something towards it.’

‘No—no, uncle,’ cried Frank, with a sudden rush of colour to his face. ‘You are exceedingly kind, but it must be bought with my own money. I’m off now to Douglas to get it.’ And he moved towards the door.

‘As you will,’ said the old man. ‘I shall devote this money to buying Nessie a present on my own account. And, Frank,’ he called softly after him, ‘bring her here as soon as possible. I am anxious to see my boy’s future wife.’

‘And, by George! so you shall, uncle,’ exclaimed Frank. ‘What a brick the old boy is!’ he added to himself as he hurried into the hall, where he stood a few minutes before going out into the street.

There was a horse of the old Manx breed, saddled and bridled, waiting for him at the door. A boy had just brought it round from the dilapidated stable behind the yard.

It was a short-legged, long-backed animal with a coat like a Shetland pony. But, in spite of its unprepossessing appearance, Frank could make it go like the wind. To-day his love was spurring him hard, so he plied the whip unmercifully. He tore down Richmond Hill at breakneck speed, and, eventually pulling up at a little, old-fashioned inn on Douglas quay, delivered his nag in a lather of foam to the ostler.

Frank now began to ransack the jewellers' shops. Never before had a young man been so impatient and so hard to please. He wanted something that Ben Varrey herself would be delighted to wear. None of your rubbish, added he, pointing scornfully to a ring that the jeweller was offering with fatherly pride; but a magnificent jewel that would make the waves look as black as thunder-clouds, and set

with gems as pure as Nessie herself. This was a big order. With a sigh, the tradesman shook his head and pointed significantly across the water.

But at last Frank discovered a pretty trinket, set with pearls and diamonds, which took his fancy. Its price was very extravagant for a young advocate with few clients ; but what did that matter so long as Nessie was pleased ! The only question was, would it fit ? Having forgotten to obtain the size of her finger, he bashfully explained that she was the right height for a woman and asked whether the ring was likely to fit. The jeweller declared it would be the very thing, whereupon Frank, after admiring it poised on the tip of his little finger, bought it and returned to the inn. This would be a red-letter day in his life, he kept telling himself during the homeward journey. More than once he

was obliged to stop in order to peep at his prize, nestling snugly in its satin-lined case. How he envied the little gold circlet which was to be Nessie's close and lifelong companion ! He rehearsed a neat speech and pictured her delight at receiving his gift. In short, he felt supremely happy.

Thus it was that, meeting Diana Knighton as he was going on foot to Claddagh House, he proudly produced the ring and asked her opinion of it. Had he possessed eyes for aught but Nessie, he would have seen a wave of colour rush into the beautiful face, the brilliant eyes darken with surprise only to sparkle with delight immediately afterwards, and the graceful figure sway as if it had found something to lean upon and need no longer preserve its independent uprightness. He did notice that she was trembling as she took

the ring, but his mind was too preoccupied to think about it.

‘It is very lovely, Frank,’ she murmured.

‘I’m so glad you like it,’ he exclaimed. ‘Whom do you think it’s for?’

They were standing on the Douglas Road beneath a high garden wall, with the sunlit bay on the other side of them. Diana, blushing, raised her eyes for a moment to Frank’s eager face and then bent them upon a white-winged schooner, which was gliding towards the harbour. The vessel had been long delayed by contrary winds, its cargo was urgently needed, and there was a crowd standing by the lighthouse on the pierhead to welcome it. Diana’s meaning was plain enough, but Frank could not see it. So she said, in a low whisper,

‘Tell me her name, Frank.’

‘Nessie Colquitt. I’m engaged to—
what!’

Diana had dropped the ring as if it had stung her: had, indeed, actually spurned it away from her with both hands. And, unheeded by either, it was lying on the dusty limestone road at their feet. No longer blushing, but white as marble, she stood erect with flashing eyes and quivering lips, as magnificent in her wrath as she was beautiful in her softer moods.

‘And you,’ she cried, ‘you dare to tell me this!’

‘What? why not?’ stammered Frank, staring, and still holding the empty case.

Convinced by his obvious astonishment and dismay that he had not meant to insult her, she changed like lightning. But the tears, which should have accompanied the change, were wanting. This was clearly a danger-signal.

‘Are you an arch flatterer, Frank?’ she asked, with a saucy ripple of laughter.

‘Or, have I really deceived you?’

‘I don’t understand you now, Diana.’

‘Pick up that ring first and put it in your pocket. There, that’s better. Didn’t you know I was acting? No? Then I must be an admirable actress. But, dear me, I forgot you had never been to a theatre in your life. Oh, Frank, how insular you are!’

Whether or not Frank had yet got an inkling of the truth, he could scarcely feel sure she had not been doing a thing which he had never seen. Moreover, Diana had artfully led him away to reflect on his ignorance of the world. While he was still blushing at that, the most dreadful thing to a young man, she brought him sharp round to his favourite topic.

‘Mermaids fell in love once, didn’t they, Frank?’ said she, silyly watching.

‘Oh, yes.’

‘Tell me the story.’

‘Ben Varrey was once in love,’ began Frank, ever ready to narrate one of the old Manx legends; ‘in love with a mortal, whom she wanted to marry her. No doubt it was very shocking of her not to wait till she was asked, but they manage these things differently beneath the sea. Every day she used to bring him the most beautiful presents—corals and pearls and precious stones of every kind, and on one occasion this forward young mermaid even went so far as to pat his cheek. It was no use, however; he felt that in her company he would be out of his element. Now, Ben Varrey has a temper—yes, a very awkward temper, sometimes. And, being

greatly vexed at her want of success, she picked up a stone, struck the backward young man with it, and disappeared. After lingering in agony, the poor fellow died : a sad ending to a love-story.'

'Very. And Ben Varrey is still alive?'

'Yes; living happily in her coral halls.'

'Then,' said Diana, lightly, 'the moral is, that a young man should think twice before refusing a mermaid's love. Good-bye, Frank.' But with a softer, almost pathetic touch, she added: 'Believe me, I wish you every blessing and every happiness the world can give.' Without appearing to see the hand he held out to her, she turned and glided away.

But, oh, the look of agony that came into her face as soon as she could safely throw aside the mask! A deadly faintness seized upon her, and she staggered to the sea-wall and leaned upon it until the breeze

had fanned fresh life into her veins. It was a strange contrast between the beautiful sea and the beautiful woman : the one lazily basking in the sunlight, now trifling with the pebbles at its edge and now murmuring its content, its very existence a pleasure on this glorious afternoon ; and the other bereft of hope and torn by the strife of many contending passions. The laughter that floated shoreward seemed a mockery of her anguish. Her life, so bright a few short minutes ago, had become a dreary pilgrimage without a shrine.

Utterly desperate though she felt, Diana was not blind to surrounding objects, and seeing in the distance a couple of men, who turned out to be Captain Nugent and Fabian Dalrymple, she resumed her way towards the town. By the time they overtook her, the most practised eye could not have detected in her the least sign of dis-

tress. She was again, what they always found her, a fascinating young widow, a charming coquette.

Among other things she told them, as if it were a pleasant piece of gossip, of Frank's engagement: a subject that no ordinary woman in the same position would have ventured upon, even if she had not shudderingly recoiled from it. If Diana wished to test her nerves, she succeeded to perfection; there was not the smallest quiver in her voice, and she looked steadily, with a mischievous smile, at Dalrymple. His success would have aided her and her success would have aided him, so there had been a sort of tacit alliance between them, which might or might not be drawn closer in the future. As we already know, he was not altogether unprepared for her announcement, and could therefore meet her gaze without flinching. But when he

had learnt all she knew on the subject, he turned the conversation into another channel.

After escorting Diana to her own door, the two officers walked in silence to the barracks. Until the captain had lighted a cigar and taken a chair by the window, and the subaltern had administered a pinch of snuff to his prehensile nose and deposited his lengthy body in the easy-chair opposite, not a word passed between them. Then the former, slowly blowing out a cloud of smoke, looked at his friend and ejaculated :

‘ Well ?’

‘ Didn’t I tell you so ?’ said Dalrymple, coolly. So deep-rooted is the prophetic spirit that he even felt a certain pleasure in the verification of a prediction which was unfavourable to himself.

‘ You did. Is that all ?’

‘For the present.’

‘I’m glad of it.’

‘But,’ said Dalymple in that indolent way of his, ‘there’s more to come. My race with the choleric islander is only just begun. He is as far off winning the mermaid’s hand as I am.’

‘How so?’

‘While a man is fighting for himself, events are fighting either for or against him. They are against me at present, but if I bide my time I shall have them on my side. My maxim is, Wait. Snuff, Nugent?’ added he, with a yawn. ‘No! Then I’ll take five to one against my being the winner of the Manx handicap.’

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM LIGHT TO DARKNESS.

FOR Frank, Diana's conduct was but the puzzle of a moment, he was in such a whirl of excitement. He found Nessie in the wilderness of a garden, and, standing beneath an old apple-tree whose outstretched arms seemed to be invoking a blessing upon them, presented the ring. She was naturally delighted with it, though her feelings were expressed by looks rather than by words, for she was as shy as if it were her wedding-day. They enacted a pretty little scene such as most lovers

have gone through—he standing with his arms around her, and she coyly hiding her sweet young face against his breast, laughing a little as he showed her the ring on the tip of his thumb, and trembling a little as with an absurd pretence of exertion, he transferred it to her wee finger.

‘And now, darling, a kiss,’ he said.

Blushing, her hazel eyes suffused with love and happiness, she turned up her sweet rosebud of a mouth, and after he had kept her so for a provokingly long time—until, indeed, he could gaze down at her no longer—their lips met as if they never would part again. But Cain the Leg, leisurely stumping round the garden, happened to bring his ruddy face exactly over a gooseberry bush opposite, whereupon the young couple started asunder like india-rubber balls and began to walk very demurely towards the house.

Mrs. Colquitt and Mona met and congratulated them in the hall, after which Nessie showed the ring on her finger.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Colquitt, inspecting it with the critical eye of the matron, ‘it’s very pretty. But could you afford it, Frank?’

He winced at this, for she had touched him on a very sore point, but he was partly consoled by feeling Nessie’s soft hand steal into his. A warning look from Mona had told Mrs. Colquitt that she had done wrong, and had probably nipped in the bud some horrible tale. So, to set matters straight, she added:

‘Well, well! I suppose a little extravagance is allowable in young people at a time like this.’

She now got a nudge from Mona, and after returning a cold stare of inquiry, vanished into the sitting-room, whence she

soon emerged dragging her husband by the ear—metaphorically. Ordered to admire the ring, he rubbed his shrivelled hands and meekly obeyed.

It was late in the afternoon when Frank left the house. On his way home it occurred to him that he might as well look in at his office. And there he found—a client? No, nothing so extraordinary—Ned Christorey, looking the very picture of patience.

Frank's office, being rather a curiosity, merits a short description. It was situated in a small house on the quay, close to the guard-room by the castle gate. A man and his wife occupied the house, all but the two front rooms on the ground floor, which were let one to Frank and the other to Mr. John Moore, another advocate, as the names on the wire-blinds of their respective windows testified. The wire-blind was almost the only legal-looking

thing in Frank's office. There was usually attached to his door, however, a card bearing this inscription, 'Back in five minutes;' or this, 'In Court;' or something else suggesting the same idea of immense pressure of business. Nobody was ever able to ascertain the exact principle which guided Frank in selecting the particular card for use, but he certainly shuffled them about at intervals. Once inside the office, the visitor intent on law was surprised to see a collection of ropes, sails, and oars in one corner, a number of guns in another, and in a third an ingenious cooking apparatus with all the necessary materials, placed on the top of an old-fashioned sideboard which served as a cellaret. The walls were decorated with flags, the table was strewn with fishing-tackle but the books were nowhere to be seen.

The reader, thinking of the earnest and

impulsive Frank who has so far figured in these pages, may also be surprised by this peep into his office, and, judging of him as an advocate, wrong the man. It must, therefore, be pointed out that until now no definite object had been set before him. To live as his father had lived, was Jacob Maddrell's maxim ; and Frank, who had in some measure imbibed the same idea, could do this without much effort. It may be the beautiful scenery or the genial climate or the vitality of old traditions, but, whatever the cause, it is no easy matter to take life seriously in the Isle of Man. There are exceptions, of course, but they only serve to prove, or rather to show the rule. Every now and again there comes a gale beating wildly against a lee-shore, a battered vessel heaves in sight, and then there is no lack of clear heads, strong arms, and resolute wills. Such a gale had already

threatened Frank, and, though he had weathered it safely, he had also reached a position in which he was compelled to go forward with all possible speed. Henceforth, he would have to work, if not for his own sake, at least for Nessie's.

And it was Nessie that Ned had come to talk about. In order to keep up his courage, he had been punching out wads, which now stood in piles upon the table. Notwithstanding these efforts, a sudden timidity came over him at Frank's entrance, and his carefully-prepared programme collapsed. Rising to his feet, he said, awkwardly,

'Hullo, Frank! Here you are at last. Your five minutes has been a long one.'

'Yes,' laughed the advocate. 'Sit down, Ned. Is this a professional visit? I'm going in for law in earnest now.'

'No, not exactly,' answered Ned, resum-

ing his chair and taking up the punch again. 'I want to consult you about a delicate affair.'

'Go ahead, old chap.' He took a seat on the table, and, seeing Ned's embarrassment, resolved to defer his own announcement until afterwards.

'Well,' said Ned, rushing his fence as usual, 'I'm desperately in love.'

'In love!' exclaimed Frank, staring hard.

It struck him as a singular thing that this ungainly young man should have fallen a victim to the tender passion. Somehow or other, we are apt to regard an unhandsome exterior as an infallible safeguard against any affection of the heart. It sounds odd, but so it is. Though Frank was beginning to appreciate many of Ned's excellent qualities, he could not resist a smile, as he added :

‘Why, Ned, I thought you were a confirmed old bachelor—one who likes newspapers and carpet-slippers and grog and hobbies, but hates women—like my uncle, you know. I congratulate you with all my heart.’

‘But,’ said Ned, nervously playing with the punch, ‘I don’t know whether it is matter for congratulation. That’s just what I want to find out. And I should like you to advise me, if you will.’

‘Certainly, Ned, you may depend upon me,’ returned Frank, warmly. He was flattered by this mark of confidence, and considered it a tribute to his own success in love-making, even though that success was as yet unknown to Ned.

‘Well, to commence with, I’ve been rejected.’

‘Rejected! Poor old fellow, I’m very sorry indeed to hear it. Then I should

certainly say, it's not matter for congratulation—unless the lady is old and ugly.'

'She's an angel, Frank. You'll say so too, I know. But what am I to do now? Should I try again? Frank, I'm almost beside myself with thinking.'

'Try again by all means, so long as you do it with discretion,' said this young professor of hearts. 'I know very well what to do, though I don't always do it. That's the annoying part of the thing. It's so easy to see the right; but when you are going to follow it, something is dropped upon you to stir you up, and bang! go all your good resolutions. Still, you will find my advice sound, for all that: keep near her as much as possible; be always ready to pop in quietly and help her; show her that you mean business and that there's no nonsense about you; but, above everything, don't worry her, for nagging may gain the

hand, but never the heart. That's my idea, at any rate. What did she say to you, Ned? Did she give you any encouragement?'

Ned, poor fellow, tried hard to smile as he pronounced the dreadful words: 'She said it would be a strange thing for us to think of marriage. Not very hopeful, was it? She meant we had been too friendly, I suppose. I don't understand it, but that's what she said.'

'May I know her name?' asked Frank, who was thinking of Mona.

'Nessie.'

Hearing a sudden movement, Ned raised his great grey eyes for the first time to Frank's face, and was startled to see there a look of horror. Not even then did any glimmering of the truth break in upon him. He stared in blank perplexity, while his friend, who was compelled to deal him a deadly blow, was trying to collect his

thoughts. A sailor's chorus came from one of the vessels in the harbour, children could be heard playing upon the quay, but inside the queer little advocate's office there was complete silence.

'Oh, Ned, my friend, this is terrible!' said Frank, with a gasp. 'No, don't—for mercy's sake, don't look this way! Look out of the window, anywhere but at me! Oh, but it's cruel that you should have to learn this thing from me. Believe me, Ned, I was as ignorant of your feelings as you still are of mine. Now, listen, Ned, listen, but don't look round! Only this very morning I thought myself the happiest man in the world, because——'

'I know—I know,' exclaimed Ned, in a voice of great agitation, as he rose hastily from his seat. There was a pause before he added: 'I can't congratulate you yet, Frank, but I will—indeed I will in a very

little time. I ought to feel happy when she is happy, and you too ; but—— Come, Toby,' said he to the dog, which thereupon emerged from beneath the sideboard. The door closed, and he was gone.

Frank speedily followed, the atmosphere of the office having become too oppressive to hold him. Scarcely noticing whither he went, he walked to Scarlett and sat down on the rocks near the Stack. By a singular coincidence, it happened to be the very spot where his unfortunate friend had been refused by Nessie. There is no need to enter into his reflections ; it will be sufficient to say that they dealt chiefly with the contrast between his own happiness and Ned's misery. After sitting a while on the porphyritic dyke, he began to retrace his steps, mounting the limestone valley on his way, and pausing at the top to gaze seawards.

And now what was that that caught his eye? A full-rigged barque sailing past the bay, in the direction of Douglas: a stately ship with tall rakish masts and all her canvas set, for the breeze was light and fitful. She was making fair headway against the tide, and had reached the Skerranes at the extremity of Langness when a strange thing happened—she remained perfectly still, though the little white waves were curling away in her wake. And there for a quarter-of-an-hour she remained, motionless yet sailing hard the whole time, not gaining or losing an inch; and then the breeze failed, and foot by foot the current swept her backwards until she was hidden by the Stack as she went away stern foremost towards the Calf. Here was a curious sight, teaching a lesson that made Frank tremble. It was Dalrymple's concluding speech to Nugent,

put in pictorial form ; and it said as plainly as could be that, let man struggle as he may, let him be never so deserving, if events fight against him his puny efforts are in vain.

Frank, naturally associating it with his most precious treasure, Nessie, resolved to put his shoulder to the wheel without delay. If any disaster should occur at the last moment, it should not be caused by want of work on his part. So next morning, when the Castle clock struck ten, he was already seated in his office. A few minutes later, greatly to his surprise, there entered a client, a certain Dick Clague, of whom it will be necessary to give a brief sketch.

Commencing life as an errand-boy in a draper's shop, he had, by honesty, hard-headed shrewdness, and dogged perseverance, worked his way up to the position of

chief assistant ; saved a considerable sum of money ; invested it by taking shares in herring-cutters—luggers belong to a more recent date—all of which had proved most remunerative ; with resolute self-denial invested the interest in the same way ; and was now, at the age of forty-five, engaged in negotiating with the draper for a partnership in the business. His mother thought he had attained a most dangerous elevation. She was a good, old-fashioned soul who wore an immense white cap and horn-rimmed spectacles, and pinned her faith to her spinning-wheel and her Bible. To her simple mind, it was a presumptuous thing for Dick to attempt to leave the station in which he had been born. She often prophesied that no good would come of such vanity, and referred to the fate of the foolish builders of Babel. Though proud of him in a way, she

thought him a little worldly, this stalwart, loose-limbed, determined-looking son of hers, who cared not whose toes he trod on so long as he was pushing ahead. Perhaps she was right. At any rate, he even pointed to a future when he would quit the trade level, purchase land—which used to be the aim of every Manxman, even the peasants having their little plots—and retire as a country gentleman, with the glorious possibility of being elected a member of the House of Keys. When Dick ventured upon this lofty platform, Mrs. Clague always lifted up her hands in pious horror.

His present business was to instruct Frank to draw out the deed of partnership. He had chosen his advocate for rather a curious reason—sympathy, strongly flavoured, however, with the spirit of patronage which often makes men of his

stamp so obnoxious. The news of Frank's engagement having flashed through the town, Clague no sooner heard it than, being himself engaged to a very nice girl called Ruth Teare, he expressed his intention of 'giving young Maddrell the job.'

'If,' said he to Frank, 'you give satisfaction in this, maybe I'll be able to put a thing or two more in your way. I don't say for certain, for I won't be bound at all. But what Dick Clague says he'll stick to, as everybody knows.'

With unusual meekness, Frank promised to do his best.

Clague, who had brought with him a weighty box, strapped and sealed, then went on to explain that it contained the money which he had received on the previous day from the sale of his shares in the herring-cutters. The purchaser had

offered him notes, but he was much too cautious for that; he would take only gold, and was so afraid of losing it that he had slept with it by his bedside, and would not go anywhere without it. Was Macdonald's Bank sound? he wanted to know.'

'As sound as Spanish Head,' replied Frank. 'But remember, Clague, that is only my private opinion, so you must take it for what it's worth. My uncle is a shareholder, at any rate; so is Mr. Colquitt; and so are many others in the town.'

'Ay, I know that,' said Clague, who had all the suspiciousness of a self-made man, 'and was countin' on it a bit. You've never heard a word against the bank, then?'

'Not a word.'

Clague lurched off, carrying his box with him. He went to the office of the

bank, a dingy little house in Arbory Street. Saturday being market-day, a number of farmers were continually dropping in and out, as also were many fishermen whose boats lay tightly packed in the harbour, their week's fishing having come to an end. But, after a short delay, Clague secured a private interview with the managing director and chief shareholder, Mr. Macdonald, a high-boned Scotchman, with long dark hair curiously polished, and a shifty eye. On this occasion he looked at the papers before him, in the drawers of his writing-table, at the carpet; but never once at Clague, who nevertheless accepted his assurances, and left the money.

That evening Frank told his uncle of his new client, and laughingly mentioned Clague's cautious inquiries about the bank.

‘I have just heard,’ said the old gentleman, quite coolly, as he looked up from a coin which he was cleaning, ‘a very ugly rumour about it.’

‘What!’ cried Frank, starting to his feet.

‘If my authority is correct, we have all been misled by false balance-sheets, and the bank, instead of being in a prosperous condition, has been insolvent for years.’

‘Great heavens, uncle! and you sit there and calmly tell me that!’

‘But, my boy,’ said Jacob Maddrell, with grave surprise, ‘what’s the good of worrying about it? We can’t do anything until Monday morning at the very earliest.’

Nero fiddled while Rome was burning because his own carcass was safe enough; but here was this pleasant old gentleman of seventy amusing himself with one of

his pet hobbies while all that he possessed was being consumed! Amazed, angry, terror-stricken, Frank flung himself out of the room, and rushed straight off to Nessie, the only person in the world who could say or do anything to console him. Yet she and her family would also be ruined. Perhaps even the engagement might have to be abandoned, for, neither of them having any money, how could they dream of marriage? When Frank thought of that tide-driven barque off Scarlett, he felt well-nigh desperate.

On the drawbridge—a quaint old wooden structure, with massive corner posts and great bars overhead, from which chains dangled and clanked in a very gallows-like way—he met Dick Clague, and told him what he had just heard, thereby doing the very thing most likely to bring down the bank, if it were still solvent. Clague

turned white to the lips ; his eyes glared, his breast heaved, and his fists were clenched. Though there was scarcely enough light to trace the forest of masts on the sky behind him, one glance at his distorted features was enough to show that the inherent power which had enabled him to climb to his present height might, his one prop gone, cast him down to depths far below those from which he had risen. He looked a perfect demon. Even the phlegmatic fishermen who were lolling about, chewing tobacco and conversing in occasional monosyllables, were struck with his attitude, and long afterwards remembered it. Though his lips moved, he never uttered a word, but strode away past the castle, and so disappeared.

In the presence of this man's mighty passions, Frank had for the moment forgotten his own. But they soon resumed

full sway, and he started off again for Claddagh House, where he found the family at supper.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT.

INSTEAD of gadding about the country as usual, the rooks always spent the greater part of Sunday morning upon the castle walls, wearing a peculiarly solemn air as they inspected the people going to church. They may have been the degenerate descendants of a superior race of Sabbath-observers, and so have retained merely an indistinct remembrance that something different ought to happen on that day; or they may have been moved to admiration of the gay dresses, or to astonishment at the black coats and top-hats which were

reserved for these occasions and funerals ; or there may have been some more subtle reason for their conduct. But, whatever the cause, such is the fact.

On this particular Sunday, most of the people they saw going to St. Mary's might with advantage have taken a lesson from them, for almost everybody displayed a strange excitement. They hurried to and fro ; they talked in agitated whispers ; they crowded around the door and then poured in all at once, but not until Mr. Hudson had taken his place in ' the three-decker,' which, however, more resembled three large goblets stuck together. The Lieutenant-Governor was already in his great square box at the end of the gallery, with the three officers in scarlet close by, and the men ranged against the wall behind ; and he looked down with surprise at this sudden rush, for the rumour about the

bank had not yet reached his ears.

As time went by, it was noticed as an ominous coincidence that Mr. Macdonald did not appear. It was also noticed that the High Bailiff, whose pew contained a convenient cupboard and a fireplace, handed his gold snuff-box about with unusual frequency, and as he always did this when his mind was disturbed, it was considered a very bad sign. It was also noticed——
But what will not people notice in church, and, when their nerves are highly strung, twist this way and that?

Nessie and Ned entered almost together, but he dared not look at her, nor she at him. They were closely followed by Frank, who showed his feelings more plainly than either. For the bitterness of death was past with Ned—he had learnt his doom; and Nessie had acquired the womanly art of smiling when she suffered; but Frank,

whose features were as outspoken as his words, was enduring the agony of suspense. He had spent a sleepless night, as his face bore witness.

The very last arrival, alas! was Diana Knighton, and her entrance created a great sensation, which she had perhaps counted upon. As the pews faced every way—so that you might be rubbing noses with your bitterest enemy—it was necessary for many to turn round in order to get a good view of anyone approaching. And there was a general turning along the whole line and a most distracting rustle of silks as Diana walked demurely in after her meek old mother, and was observed to have doffed her widow's weeds for gay apparel, in which she looked superbly beautiful. All were astonished; but, while the men could not admire her enough, the women unanimously professed themselves

shocked. To drop her mourning all of a sudden—had the memory of a husband ever been so slighted before! It just proved, they said, her utter heartlessness. As a matter of fact, it proved the very reverse, though it had of course nothing to do with the rumours about the bank. Indeed, she did not hear them until after service: a service that struck everybody as being abnormally tedious.

Seldom has a clergyman laboured under greater disadvantages than the old chaplain did this morning. Even the leathery old clerk who preceded him up the stairs to the highest goblet, stood there forgetting to open the door. When Mr. Hudson began to preach, he felt that little he said would penetrate beyond the ears of his flock. Painfully aware that he had brought his longest sermon, a good old-fashioned discourse divided into thirteen heads, he

was wondering whether he could abbreviate it, when a singular interruption occurred.

A bent old woman—his own servant and a character in her way, as he was in his—poked her head in at the church-door and, imperiously beckoning to him, called out :

‘Come down from above there, or the hen’ll be parched.’

‘I doubt, Martha,’ replied the chaplain, as all smiled pleasantly at one another like members of the same family, ‘if it can get as dry as they think me up here.’ And whether or not he was afraid of having his dinner spoilt, he soon afterwards brought his sermon to an end.

The church was emptied in a marvelously short space of time. Instead of dispersing, the congregation remained in the market-place, which was dotted all over with groups, some going as far as the

bank to stare anxiously at the closed door and shuttered windows. When the military, drawn up in line outside St. Mary's, had saluted His Excellency and marched off to the barracks, there was nothing to divert attention from the chief topic of the day, and everybody attacked it with a will. Diana heard it from a number of advocates who clustered around her, and it gave her quite a shock. But when she had learnt it was merely a rumour, she regained her usual gaiety.

‘I want you all to help me in a little conspiracy,’ she laughingly said to them. ‘There’s Frank, an engaged man, doing his utmost to monopolise Nessie, though he will soon have her all to himself. It’s unfair. Now, suppose some of you look after Nessie, and I—well, I’ll sacrifice myself, and take charge of this selfish young man.’

They went like sheep: with only one idea in their foolish heads—to please her. Left to herself, Diana had no difficulty in capturing Frank, whose fears she tried hard, but vainly, to allay. Recognising the strength of his forebodings, she changed her tactics.

‘Do you remember,’ she said, earnestly, ‘when telling me the story of Tehi-tegi, the picture you drew of the deluded Manxmen crouching on the banks of the dark river as they waited for death?’

‘Yes, I remember it,’ replied Frank, with a puzzled look.

‘Has it never struck you that they might have done better? In repairing their ruined cottages and tilling their neglected fields, for example?’

‘But there comes a time for some poor crushed things when nothing remains for them but to lie down and die.’

‘It’s not very manly of them, Frank,’ said Diana yet her voice and tones showed pity rather than reproof.

‘It’s human, though.’

‘Still, as a Manxman whose self-reliant motto is *Quocunque Jeceris Stabit*, would you do that, Frank? Wouldn’t you fight on to the bitter end, determined, if possible, to pluck a little victory out of a big defeat?’

‘Yes, I think I should.’

‘It is hard to be confronted by an accomplished fact—very hard. But then what can we do?’

‘Nothing but submit in that direction and peg ahead in another,’ answered Frank, with a look of gratitude at Diana, whose kindly words of encouragement seemed to annul the teaching of the tide-driven barque.

‘Quite so,’ assented Diana, with satisfac-

tion. 'And now,' added she, dashing into a lighter mood as Mrs. Sherwood came up smiling, 'here is a worthy example for you, Frank. Mother has a most unwomanly way of accepting an accomplished fact. She never nags—when nothing is to be gained by nagging; do you, mother mine? The dog that worried the cow with the crumpled horn got tossed for its pains; and I, having a very keen crumpled horn and she a strong objection to being tossed, why, you see, we get on very well together.'

'What nonsense you do talk, Diana!' said Mrs. Sherwood, an Indian-looking old lady; by which is meant that her fingers were covered with rings, her shawl and lace had a decidedly oriental appearance, her figure was very spare, her skin brown and wrinkled, and her expression as if such spirit as she had once possessed had been evaporated by a hot sun.

‘Don’t you think, Frank,’ she said, ‘Diana’s looking very ill this morning?’

Diana could not meet his eye, though he could meet hers. She changed colour beneath his steady gaze, and the change showed the more clearly how pale she had been before.

‘She went off for a long walk by herself,’ continued Mrs. Sherwood, ‘in the cold night air and caught a chill.’

‘There, mother, that’ll do,’ interrupted Diana, hastily. ‘Good-morning, Frank! I suppose you are going to dine at Claddagh House?’

‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Good-morning, Mrs. Sherwood. Good-morning, Diana.’ And, taking off his hat, he hurried off to join the Colquitts who had already started for home.

Among those who still remained in the market-place was Fabian Dalrymple,

looking taller than ever in his uniform. After marching his men back to the barracks, he had returned to see what was going on. To his credit, be it said that, as if he too had sat at the feet of the beautiful Diana who could preach so fluently about resignation, he had made no attempt to force himself upon Nessie. The cordon which he had established around her, had been broken down, and, notwithstanding the quizzical remarks made to him by several old ladies who were rather annoyed to find their predictions falsified, he showed no disposition to repair the damage. A few polite words were all that he exchanged with her; then he passed on, amusing himself, in his cynical languid way, with watching the progress of what he called 'a storm in a teapot.'

Yet the subject had a deeper interest for him than he cared to show. Afterwards,

when he sauntered into the captain's room, he said with that peculiar smile of his :

‘The tide, you see, has turned already.’

‘How so?’

‘Why, if this bank really breaks, the Colquitts and Maddrells will be ruined. Then, no patrimony, no matrimony, you know.’

Nugent laid down his cigar to stare. ‘Do you mean to tell me, Dalrymple,’ he said, dropping out the words one by one, ‘that you are such a heartless fellow as all that?’

Without seeming to hear, Dalrymple raised a Maori blow-tube to his mouth, and, leaning out of the window, deliberately ‘potted’ a dog trotting across the market-place. The dog gave a howl, stopped to look round for its assailant, and, seeing none, bolted in terror.

‘I owed that dog a grudge,’ said Dalrymple, ‘and now I’ve paid him. Heartless? No. Would you be heartless if you took advantage of a confusion in the enemy’s ranks to charge? But I don’t even do that; I merely bide my time.’

‘In other words, you are waiting and wishing for the ruin of the very girl you profess to love—the mermaid, as you call her.’

‘Stop a bit, Nugent. I have money, remember: more money probably than she will lose. And, if I win her, she is welcome to it all. Why, I don’t bear malice even against the choleric islander. After I have defeated him, if I can help him I will.’

‘So you seriously think that this girl will abandon her lover when his money is gone!’

Dalrymple shrugged his shoulders.

‘What a fellow you are to argue!’ he said. ‘Such things have been before and will be again. But let me tell you another thing: I have got my eye on a dark horse for the Manx handicap—that lubberly fellow Christorey, if you please. I have suspected it for some time: I felt certain when I saw his manner in church this morning. He *may* prove dangerous, but—’ He ended with a pinch of snuff.

The next day opened with fog, which about eight o’clock changed to a dense Scotch mist. It curtained off the sky, the land, and the sea—which made its moan plainly audible, however—and seemed to narrow the universe down to this little grey town; in the centre of which towered Castle Rushen like some hoary giant who possessed the power of continually changing his shape.

While the morning was still young,

many pale faces came out of the mist, and, peering about like travellers from another world, clustered in the market-place. Farmers' carts poured into the town, as on a Saturday, and the farmers themselves, in their shaggy top-hats and swallow-tail coats made of some rough blue material, joined the rapidly increasing crowd. The fishermen mustered in great strength, for the herring-fleet did not put to sea at all on this Black Monday, so the Manxmen were reinforced by a large number of Scotch, Irish, and Cornishmen, drawn to the scene by curiosity. Many of the peasantry were there, many tradesmen, many women, and even many servant-girls who had deposited their small savings in the bank.

Arbory Street was completely blocked by a silent, patient throng, staring fixedly at the door. The three constables in

the town tried to get the people to move on, but might as well have spoken to a limestone cliff. The advocates were more sprightly; at least such of them as would lose nothing and might gain much, for the matter promised a flourishing crop of law-suits. Among those who stood on the outskirts of the crowd were Major Christorey and Fabian Dalrymple, though they were neither shareholders nor depositors; and Jacob Maddrell and Mr. Colquitt who were both, the former improving the occasion by lecturing the latter on the sin of shaving off the gift of Providence. Frank kept to no particular spot; he was in such torture that he rushed about everywhere. And Dick Clague? He stood nearest the bank-door. At an early hour he had taken up his position there, and never moved from it or uttered a word. His muscles were in knots, and

his face wore the awful grim look of a man whose stormy passions run deep.

Every now and again eyes were directed towards the Castle clock, scarcely visible through the mist that fitfully danced around it, and the progress of the single hand towards the hour of ten was watched with feverish anxiety. When that time approached, the excitement became intense. The separate groups were wedged in one great crowd—a crowd of heterogeneous atoms that for the moment thought, felt, hoped, and breathed in unison. Such was the tension of their feelings that, when at length the first stroke of ten fell upon the silence, it wrung from each a cry, a sigh, or a murmur, according to the organization. This only intensified the silence that followed. Those in front stared the more doggedly, and those behind stood on tiptoe.

Five minutes went by, and the door still remained closed. Ten minutes, and no change. A quarter-of-an-hour! Half an-hour! It was with a sickening sensation that some turned for the first time to look at their neighbours, and saw, not the hopeful sign they hungered for, but haggard faces streaming with perspiration like their own. All felt themselves in the presence of one of Diana's 'accomplished facts.' They had wooed the fickle goddess Fortune, and she, like Tehi-tegi, had mocked and left them—how? The soldiers, lolling out of the barrack windows, looked down upon a scene of mute, impotent despair.

Yet it was not without its lighter shades. What crowd ever is, no matter what the occasion, though the humour is not always intentional? To take a case in point.

When it became certain that the bank had failed, and ruin had overtaken most of the people collected around it, there ascended the glacis a magnificent creature, with a noble face, classical features, black hair, black eyes which shone with fitful brilliancy, and a majestic figure clad from head to foot in a flowing black mantle which now glittered with raindrops. Black Deborah, as she was called, was in some respects a remarkable woman, and, though mad, not unmethodical. Standing with her back to the sundial, she began to address the crowd, through which passed a thrill of superstitious awe. After roundly denouncing Mr. Macdonald as a knave and her audience as fools, she proceeded to administer a little consolation. On the authority of the Prophet Elijah, whose mantle she wore, she announced the arrival of the Millennium. This was not, as it

might seem, a piece of sarcasm; for the Millennium, she said, brought with it absolute immunity from rent. A thorough believer in her own doctrines, Black Deborah henceforth stoutly refused to pay her incredulous landlord, Mr. Colquitt.

Bobby Beg the Simpleton, dancing to and fro in his three coats and brimless hat, and trolling out some merry song, was another ludicrous element in the scene. But most of the sights were sad in the extreme.

Sitting on the steps of the freestone column in the centre of the market-place, there was a countrywoman in a red shawl and a poke bonnet. She had a child with her and was sobbing piteously, the tears falling on a bundle of bank-notes which lay on her lap. She had no other money in the world, and this had, as she thought, been rendered valueless by the failure.

No one noticed her, and so she sobbed on, the child crying too for sympathy, while the drizzling rain beat down upon both. But presently Frank came striding by, and was touched by this picture of distress. The collective trouble of the crowd, beside which his own sank into insignificance, had filled him with a longing to be of some assistance. When the woman had told her story, he said :

‘ But you may not be a loser at all.’

Her tears stopped as if by magic. She stared up at him in bewilderment.

‘ Take these,’ he said, tapping the bundle he had taken from her, ‘ to a notary and get him to “note” them. You must pay him eighteenpence a-piece for doing that, but the money will afterwards be returned to you by the bank. Do you understand so far? Very well, then. If you do as I say, your notes will bear interest at five

per cent.; and if, as is most likely, the bank has enough funds to cover the note-issue, you will be paid in full, with interest up to that date. But come with me; I'll set you straight.'

She poured blessings upon his head; and when she had hushed her child's cries and taken the little thing in her arms, went with him readily. Walking by the side of this grateful countrywoman, Frank was conscious of a happier frame of mind; somehow or other, his intolerable burden seemed to have been lightened a little.

But when they came opposite his uncle's house, he suddenly stopped to gaze in amazement at a brass-plate upon the door. It was inscribed thus: 'Mr. Jacob Maddrell, Advocate and Notary Public.' Considering what Frank had told Dalrymple about the legal profession in the island, I have thought it superfluous to

say that Mr. Maddrell belonged to it, especially as he had given up practising. The plate that had rooted Frank to the ground, was the old one, hunted out of the lumber-room, polished, and replaced upon the door.

It was some time before he could realize the situation; and then he grasped the woman by the arm and dragged her into the house. He found his uncle preparing the back room as an office as of old; in fact, cheerfully setting to work, at the age of seventy, to make a fresh start in life now that he had lost his all.

‘You see, Frank,’ said the old gentleman, pleasantly, ‘I am getting into harness again. I have just discovered there’s a good bit of work in me yet.’

‘And here,’ returned Frank, with a very full heart, ‘is a client I have brought you.’

‘Bravo, Frank!’ And beaming with delight he sat down to his desk.

The woman’s business was soon concluded. She had brought two-hundred and fifty pounds, which were duly noted and left in the advocate’s safe keeping. When she had gone, he set aside eighteen of the number to show what he would receive for the transaction, and pointed to them with childlike pride.

‘A capital beginning,’ he said. ‘There are a good many dinners there.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ said Frank. ‘But, uncle, what’s the meaning of it all? It’s for me to work, and not you. Don’t you think I can earn enough for both? Oh, but I’m sure I can.’

‘No doubt, my boy, but each must take his fair share.’

‘Well, then,’ urged Frank, who thought he could attain his end in another way, ‘let us work in partnership.’

But Mr. Maddrell was an advocate of experience.

‘Don’t you know,’ he said, with a sly look, ‘that lawyers can make business for one another. No, no, two firms will do better than one. And now, Frank, is the time for clients. Run off and bring them in—by the bushel.’

On this advice Frank was not slow to act. But an unexpected circumstance interfered with his success.

CHAPTER X.

RESULTS OF THE FAILURE.

WHILE Frank was indoors the arrival of a number of speculators had effected a complete change in the scene. Some were agents of different banks, and others were acting on their own account; but the object of all was the same—to buy up the notes of Macdonald's bank. There was an immense amount of ignorance on the subject; just as a big war sends the people rushing to the atlas, so a disaster like the present inculcates knowledge if it does nothing else. At first the notes were sold at an absurdly low figure, and even when

the truth became more generally diffused the clamorous eagerness of the holders to sell kept down the price. But, on the other hand, the speculators were eager to buy; and, by bidding against one another, sent up the price until at length the one-pound notes of a broken bank were fetching nearly twenty shillings apiece!

When Frank emerged once more in the rain, he beheld the buyers perched at intervals along the glacis, each accompanied by a clerk and a couple of stout porters with a box of gold, and each confronted by a dense semi-circle of men and women, waving bundles of notes in the air and shouting as they stood in the street or market-place below. It was a strange scene to be enacted around the walls of the old Castle, which, though it had passed through many a siege, had never before been so assailed by its own townsmen.

Approaching one of the groups, Frank met the woman he had just befriended. Wiser now, she wanted her notes back, because she thought a bird in the hand better than two in the bush, and, moreover, required money for immediate expenses. Anxious to spare his uncle's feelings, Frank endeavoured to reassure her on the first point; and with regard to the second, offered to advance what she required. But she could only repeat one unvarying formula—she wanted to change her notes for gold. Legally speaking, of course, the thing was done and could not be undone. At the same time, knowing that his uncle would be vexed if he afterwards came to hear of any opposition to the woman's wish, Frank took her back to the house, where she stated her business. Though with a cheerful face, it was with a terrible heart-pang that the old man accord-

ed to her demand. And so the eighteen pounds he had made and been so proud of, were swept away.

‘She’s an unthankful brute,’ savagely exclaimed Frank, when she had gone.

‘Don’t say that, my boy,’ said his uncle, gently. ‘In a time of panic we are none of us responsible for our acts. Besides, she means no harm, and doubtless wants her money. I wonder, Frank,’ added he, looking wistfully towards the door, ‘if anyone has yet noticed that the old plate is back in its place.’

Unable to bear the sight of the old man sitting there, patiently waiting for a chance client, Frank speedily left the quiet back-room for the turbulent scene outside. He was also a little afraid lest something should be said about the necessity of abandoning his engagement with Nessie, and so did not like to remain alone with

his uncle. But instead of going to her, he lingered around the whirlpool which had swallowed up his happiness, for he was drawn thither by an irresistible fascination, due perhaps to a vague hope that some fragment of the wreck might yet float to the surface. It was no doubt the same idea that held the crowd in a compact mass around the bank—such at least as were not fortunate enough to be note-holders. And always nearest the door, still in the same determined attitude, still with the same desperate look, stood Dick Clague.

One fact, which greatly intensified the distress, must not be omitted. Every tradesman had the power of issuing notes for which there was no other security than his own credit. Silver being less plentiful then than it is now, these notes were in many ways convenient; they usually

represented very small sums, and passed freely from hand to hand. But, taken in the aggregate, they were quite large enough to become a source of danger in a time of commercial panic. When their issuer failed, they were of course rendered valueless; and, even if he stood firm, they did not. During the course of this memorable day, a certain butcher, who had not failed as yet at any rate, was standing in his doorway when a bundle of his own notes was brought to him, with a request to cash them.

‘Take them to Caveen,’ he said, pointing to a grocer’s in the same street; ‘maybe he’ll cash them for you.’

‘He won’t, for I’ve tried him,’ was the answer.

‘Then,’ said the butcher, with a grim smile, ‘I don’t think I will, either.’ And he turned on his heel and entered the shop.

This incident will show that the lower classes, many of whom had been laying by a stock of these notes against a rainy day, were reduced to a very lamentable condition. There was plenty of work for philanthropy to do, and, fortunately, no lack of willing workers.

Frank found that a Relief Committee was already in course of formation. The Lieutenant-Governor, the High Bailiff, Major Christorey, and many others had promised handsome subscriptions, and money was coming in rapidly. Among others, Fabian Dalrymple, though a stranger to the town, had given a really large sum, which won for him the votes of many who had previously disliked him. But it was the distribution of the money collected that offered one of the chief difficulties.

Beggars in those days fared royally,

finding good food, chairs by the fire-side, and beds ready for them in any house they choose to enter; some even rode about the country on horseback, with small fortunes in their saddle-bags, and their noses in the air when any but the best fare was offered them. But, apart from these professional scamps who were few in number, the Manx peasantry had the strongest antipathy to mendicancy in their own families, and did their utmost to support their poor relations sooner than allow them to 'go on the houses.'

To have offered alms to any of this sturdy race would have been equivalent to an insult. Hence great tact had to be employed in administering the proposed relief, and for this mission none could have been more suitable than Mr. Hudson. Heedless of the rain, he went to and fro nearly all day. Many of those whom he

knew to be in immediate want of money, he persuaded to accept a temporary loan; and, assisted by a number of volunteers, he gradually melted down the crowd. At last, late in the afternoon, there remained at the bank door only one man—Dick Clague.

Macdonald's bank being unlimited, the shareholders would fare badly, but the depositors would eventually receive back some of their money, and perhaps all. Clague was told this over and over again, but he would not or could not understand it. No one could extract a single word from him; when spoken to he did not even turn his head, but kept his eyes fixed straight in front of him. The door of the bank which contained his gold was closed against him, and that was all he seemed to know or care about.

It is no easy matter to describe his

mental condition at this time. Briefly, it was as if his brain had been suddenly petrified, the seething passions being consequently prevented from making for themselves an outlet. To make this more clear, disassociate the intellectual from the moral man, and remember that the latter, be he never so powerful, can only express himself through the instrumentality of the former. Ruth Teare came and pleaded with Clague; so did his mother, hobbling on her stick. But he turned a deaf ear to both. Neither love nor filial affection could move him now. Outwardly he was a statue; inwardly a volcano. His mother went off, indignantly saying she had known all along what would be the end of a man so 'wise in his own conceits,' but Ruth sat down on a neighbouring door-step and wept bitterly. She, poor thing, would have remained there near him far into the

night had not her father come to lead her away.

No one knew at what hour Clague left the bank, which wrought his ruin, and, as we shall see presently, led to the crowning happiness of another, so strangely are our lives interwoven. He did not sleep at home that night, and it has never been ascertained how he spent the time, but he probably wandered about the country. At all events, there seems to have struggled into his torpid brain a solitary idea: namely, that Macdonald the cause of the mischief, lived, not at the bank, but at his private house, which was situated at the sharp elbow in the Douglas Road just beyond the drawbridge, and that he (Clague) should be there. With what object, who can say?

When the morning broke, it showed Clague stationed in the smithy opposite,

and when the evening came he was still there, his ghastly face staring over the glowing metal on the anvil at the house across the road, and never moving, though the blacksmith's hammer filled the air with flying sparks. Late at night he went home, but next morning he came again, bringing with him enough provisions for the day.

About eleven o'clock that night Macdonald, who had been a great walker, crept stealthily out of his back-door, and Clague went after him down the road. The former, looking frequently over his shoulder, saw that he was being followed, and quickened his pace, whereupon the latter did the same. And so they went on for many a mile into the country, the one always keeping the same distance behind the other. In vain, the terrified banker wriggled and twisted; in vain, he turned up this lane and down that; in vain, he

cut across the fields and dodged back like a hare. Clague stuck doggedly to his heels, never saying a word, never lifting an arm in menace, moving through the night like a shadow, yet looking the very incarnation of remorseless revenge.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE BRINK.

THE situation as seen by Dalrymple may be briefly sketched as follows :

He had guessed that Diana Knighton was in love with Frank ; and he knew that, piqued at the success of a rival he despised, he was drifting into love with Nessie, whom he had believed he could marry if he chose. As he and Diana were both rich, while the other two had been rendered almost penniless by the bank failure, the young couple would have a double temptation to drag them asunder. Here, also, Ned Christorey might prove useful, and could

easily be shelved when his task was performed.

Hence Dalrymple still thought it better to bide his time, leaving his beautiful and accomplished ally to do all the work. Though only a subaltern, he was learned in the art of war.

However, two things occurred to disturb his plans. One was the serious illness of Diana, the cold having baffled Dr. Myl-worry and turned to inflammation of the lungs—a most deadly disease, as Mrs. Colquitt pleasantly assured everybody she met. The other was the surprising activity displayed by Mr. Maddrell now that he had been aroused out of the placid dream of living as his fathers had lived.

Instead of condemning the engagement, as Frank had feared, the old man backed him up nobly and spared no effort to ensure its continuance. Working for his

bread, he worked also for his nephew; he rose at six every morning and read law like a student; he sold many of his treasures; in short, he neglected no way of making money, for upon it Frank's marriage and happiness depended. He even brought his collection of coins to the hammer. But, oh, what a pang it cost him! Though he insisted upon this piece of self-sacrifice, saying he was glad to get rid of the rubbish, he shed bitter tears in his own room. One thing he could not part with—his father's house. He clung to that, and then reproached himself for what he called his selfishness.

As an advocate, Mr. Maddrell found clients few and far between; so, determined not to be beaten, he engaged a boy to act as clerk, left him in charge of the office, and went out and fished for his dinner and Frank's. No doubt everybody could do

the same, but would they? One day as this venerable old gentleman, with his rod over his shoulder, was blithely walking off to the rocks, Mr. Colquitt came in sight, skulking along like a whipped cur, afraid of being seen, and carrying a fishing-rod disguised as a walking-stick! He was bound on a similar expedition, but with a difference—he was acting under peremptory orders from his wife. And now comes the strangest part of the affair. Mr. Maddrell, who made no attempt to conceal his occupation, had not fished for many years, whereas Mr. Colquitt, who was now ashamed of it, fished three or four times a week publicly off the pierhead with Georgie by his side!

When the long-bearded old gentleman saw the other he went for him as a hungry dog goes for a bone, and began to talk about—their common misfortune? no—the

sin of shaving. He defied Mr. Colquitt to produce any passage from the Bible in support of his practice, and quoted Samson against him.

So far as Frank was concerned, then, the bank failure was not an unmitigated calamity, for it taught him many a lesson both by precept and by example. He learned, among other things, that he possessed a dear old uncle whose real nature he saw clearly for the first time. He learned also that he had a true friend in Ned Christorey.

Ned, who had been exhorted by his father to go in and win, now came forward and offered his rival the sinews of war, thus doing his utmost to extinguish any chance of success he himself might have. His mother had taken his defeat sadly to heart ; his father had waxed indignant ; but Ned had borne it with a patience that never

deserted him. For him, the bank failure had proved a genuine boon, as it had provided him with plenty of occupation.

‘Frank,’ he said, in his awkward way, ‘I said I would congratulate you, and I can’t congratulate you better than by asking you to do me a favour.’

‘Say on, Ned,’ exclaimed impulsive Frank. ‘You know it’s granted, old chap, before it’s asked.’

‘Well,’ said Ned, slowly tracing a pattern with his stick on the office floor, ‘I have lots of money I don’t want and don’t know what to do with. In fact, it’s a nuisance—a downright nuisance, Frank,’ added he, with emphasis. ‘Will you take charge of it for me?’

‘Invest it, you mean?’

‘Yes, I mean an investment. I want an investment that will bring me in splendid interest.’

‘A hard thing to find just now,’ commented Frank, smiling.

‘I don’t know that,’ said Ned, momentarily raising his eyes. ‘I am anxious to put this money out on loan. In fact’—he had been unusually long in coming to his point, and now rushed at it—‘I want you to have it.’

The tears started into Frank’s eyes. And this was the man whom he used to consider rather a fool! He said, with a strange catch in his voice:

‘Ned, you are a brick. But, old chap, I don’t want your money. I don’t, indeed, or, believe me, I would gladly take it.’

The conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Bobby Beg. He took off his brimless hat with both hands and stood silently grinning over it.

‘What is it, Bobby Beg?’ demanded Frank.

‘A latter, Masther Frank.’

‘Then where is it?’

‘I wass to give it into your own hand, Masther Frank,’ proceeded Bobby Beg, still grinning, ‘and I wass to make royal speed. That wass the message I got.’

‘Well, well, give me the letter.’

Bobby Beg drew from one of the many pockets in his numerous coats a letter from Diana Knighton, who, as she had told Frank she would do, had found the simpleton some work to do in her garden—a small patch of ground at the back of the house. When he had delivered the letter, he replaced his hat on his yellow head and went out, still grinning. The next moment they could hear him singing, as he danced along the quay :

‘The king can only love his wife,
And I can do the same ;
I loves my gal with all my life,
And that’s the for I came.’

Diana's letter gave Frank a dreadful shock. It told him she was dying; and also begged him to come to her without a moment's delay, as she had something of the utmost importance to say to him. Of course, he went at once.

Dr. Mylworry's greyhounds were scampering about the market-place, and the doctor himself was coming down the steps of Diana's house as Frank approached.

'She wishes to see you,' he said, looking at Frank very gravely. 'Your visit can do but little harm.'

'Is it so hopeless as that?'

'In less than twenty-four hours she will be out of my hands. Even as it is, I wished to forbid your seeing her, but she never could endure contradiction, and her weakness seems only to have strengthened

her will. Poor Diana!' he added, with a sigh. 'Castletown will never see such a beauty again.'

'Do you know why she has sent for me?'

The doctor shook his head.

'The ways of women are incomprehensible,' he replied, and strode off.

Mrs. Sherwood, sobbing hysterically, opened the door to Frank. The few broken sentences she uttered were almost unintelligible. Frank's nerves had been much shaken before, but the sight of the mother's grief quite unmanned him. He begged for a short delay before going upstairs, and, Mrs. Sherwood being too distraught to think of asking him to sit down, they stood together in the hall, until at length he motioned to her to proceed. Then she conducted him to her daughter's

bedside, and, at Diana's request, went away to an adjoining room, through the open door of which her sobs came with distressing frequency.

If Frank had been able to think of anything of the sort at such a moment, Diana's appearance must strongly have reminded him of his picture of Tehi-tegi; for her beautiful black hair was flowing around her shoulders, and her dark eyes had gained in lustre, perhaps owing to the paleness of her face, which wore a smile of ineffable sweetness. Ill as she was, she had evidently tried to look her best, but her pretty pink jacket formed a sad contrast to her colourless cheeks.

At the first sight of Diana propped up among the pillows, Frank came to a sudden halt, he was so shocked at the change in her. Then he advanced timidly, with noiseless footsteps.

‘How grieved I am to see you like this, Diana!’ he almost whispered, taking the hand she held out to him.

‘Grieved, Frank, when my troubles are nearly over!’

‘Don’t say that, Diana. You must get better; we can’t spare you.’ Even while speaking he was reproaching himself for encouraging a vain hope.

‘No, it’s not to be,’ she said, decidedly; and yet she still clung to his hand, as though by its aid she would cling to life itself. ‘But sit down, Frank—here, on this chair—here. Because’—and it was the old Diana that spoke—‘my voice is not as strong as it was.’

‘If only I could do something for you!’ broke out Frank.

‘You can, Frank,’ said she, smiling, ‘and that is why I sent for you. I’m coming to it. I must be quick. Dr. Myl-

worry says I shall never see another day. In the time to come, when I am far away, will you sometimes think of Diana !'

How wistfully her eyes rested upon him as she put this question !

'I shall never, never forget my dear friend,' he faltered.

As if under the influence of a painful spasm, her hand tightened convulsively upon his, which was resting on the coverlet. She hastily changed the subject.

'Will you do me a great—a very great favour?' she asked.

'You cannot doubt that, Diana.'

'You promise, Frank?' she exclaimed, with great eagerness, raising her head to watch him.

After a look of surprise he replied, solemnly,

'I promise.'

A strange smile overspread her features.

‘ You have promised,’ she said, rather wildly; ‘ remember, Frank, you have promised. It’s to help my mother. When I die she will be left penniless, unless——’ And then she broke out entreatingly, ‘ Leave me, Frank, leave me at once. Go—please, please, go! Oh, why won’t you go!’ she cried, with startling energy.

Pale, trembling, fancying that he was witnessing some terrible phase of her malady, Frank rose from his seat and was hurrying from the room. But before he had reached the door she called him back—called him in a voice so soft and tender that he obeyed like one in a dream.

‘ Frank,’ she said, taking his hand when he stood by the bed-side, ‘ forgive me! I am weak—dying—or I should never have doubted you. Please, pass me that medicine—on the table there.’ She lay back silent for a time, looking thoroughly ex-

hausted. But whether the cause was the medicine or her own indomitable courage, she soon recovered sufficiently to add: 'By my father's will—a very hard and cruel will—my mother will be left penniless on my death—unless I have married again. In that case she and my husband must be benefited equally. For my sake, for my mother's sake, will you marry a dying woman for the few hours—perhaps the few minutes—she has yet to live?'

He staggered back gasping.

'Remember your promise!' she cried. 'You have given me a solemn pledge on my death-bed. Surely, you won't hesitate. Oh, Frank, think of my poor mother! It is but an empty form,' she added, with a shiver. 'To-morrow I shall be gone, and you will be free. Speak, Frank! Why don't you speak?'

'I must go and ask Nessie,' he said,

slowly, struggling to collect his scattered thoughts.

‘But your promise, Frank!’ insisted Diana, again taking his hand in both of hers.

‘I’ll tell her everything,’ he said.

‘Oh, don’t leave me!’ she pleaded. ‘I may be gone before you return. Go, then, go quickly,’ added she, pushing him away from her, ‘while there is yet time. Oh, Frank, get back before it’s too late. Bring Mr. Hudson and—licence——’ Words failing her, she pointed feebly to the medicine bottle, but afterwards added, in a whisper, ‘Mother.’

Frank walked to the open door, and, looking through into the next room, saw that Mrs. Sherwood, exhausted by grief and watching, had fallen asleep. But at his summons she awoke and went to her daughter, while he blundered downstairs.

Acted upon by many different forces, he scarcely knew what he was doing; his brain was in a whirl; those whom he passed on his way to Claddagh House were as figures moving through a thick mist, and speaking to him with far-off voices.

Frank found the Colquitts assembled for dinner, and before them all said what he had come to say, his words being listened to amid a startled silence. Mrs. Colquitt was the first to speak, and on the score of expediency she strongly advocated the fulfilment of the promise which Frank had given with characteristic impulsiveness. Mr. Colquitt, of course, followed his wife's lead. Mona was also of the same opinion: because, as she said, the marriage would after all be merely a matter of form, and any sentimental objections must therefore fall to the ground. She regarded the marriage as a clever device for defeating an

iniquitous will, and thought the young couple would be handsomely paid for their share in the transaction.

But Nessie sat silent, her eyes downcast, and her sweet young face white to the quivering lips. She, alone among them all, had divined the nature of Diana's feelings for Frank.

'Come, Nessie, why don't you speak?' exclaimed her mother, impatiently. 'You, surely, wouldn't have Frank break his word—to a dying woman too. And then think of us! It's not like you to be selfish, and goodness knows the state we are in for want of money. Not one single thing has your father ever done to provide bread for his children, and look at the result! We are all beggars—yes, beggars, Mr. C., while you sit toasting your toes at an empty grate. Plainly enough I see before me a pauper's funeral.'

‘Mother dear!’ interrupted Mona, warningly. Whereupon Mrs. Colquitt collapsed, frowning over folded hands.

But for this little incident, Nessie would scarcely have been allowed to quit the room without a word of explanation. She had hastily left her seat, linked her hand in Frank’s, and led him into the hall.

‘Frank,’ she faltered, playing with his watch-chain, and not daring to look at him, ‘you won’t love me any the less because you marry Diana?’

‘Love you the less, my darling!’ he said, showering down the hot kisses upon her.

‘But will you, dear?’

‘No—no—no! A thousand times, no.’

‘Then,’ she said, trembling, ‘I think I can spare you to her—for a day. It would be very selfish of me not to do so when she is dying and wishes it so much—to save

her mother from ruin. Besides, Frank, you have promised.'

Had he known that she had regarded Diana in the light of a formidable rival he would have been even more moved than he was. The directness with which Mrs. Colquitt and Mona had put the monetary inducement before him, had made him recoil from the proposed step with something very like disgust. But Nessie, who was free from all taint of worldliness, had put the matter in an entirely new light. When it had passed through her innocent mind, it became purely an act of self-denial which she felt it her duty to make. Strange by what opposite motives we may be impelled towards the same goal!

Frank hesitated no longer. He kissed Nessie passionately; called her every name in a lover's vocabulary; returned to her again and again as if he were taking leave

of her for ever ; and at last tore himself away.

Frank was spared a long ride to Bishop's Court, for the Bishop of Sodor and Man, who has the power of granting special licences, was at that time on a visit to the Lieutenant-Governor. It was a considerable time, however, before he found his Lordship, and even then some formalities had to be gone through which consumed many more of the precious minutes. However, Frank got his licence at last, paid his fifteen shillings for it, and hastened off to the chaplain's residence. Here again a vexatious delay occurred, as the old man was visiting some of the poor members of his congregation in Queen Street. Frank, who was the whole time in a most agitated frame of mind, had to dive into one house after another, and, as so often happens in

such cases, the person he sought was in the very last of them.

Told nothing but the plain fact that he was wanted to marry Frank and Diana at once, Mr. Hudson stared hard but made no comment. Remonstrance was clearly deprecated, and he was not the man to force his opinion upon anyone, especially when the necessary data were withheld from him. He went no nearer the subject than to inquire after Diana, and when Frank briefly replied that she was not expected to survive the day, he relapsed into silence. And so they walked on side by side to the market-place, where Mr. Hudson made a short expedition by himself to fetch his bag.

When they entered the house where the solemn ceremony was to be performed, they found Mrs. Sherwood quite incapable of

being present. Volunteering to get a witness, the chaplain went out, and, a few minutes later, returned with—Fabian Dalrymple! Just think what this man's feelings must have been as he stood by the bedside of the dying woman, whom he had known only as a charming coquette, and witnessed her marriage with his successful rival, Nessie's affianced lover!

With as little delay as possible, Mr. Hudson commenced the service.

We must turn for a moment to a very humble individual, Bobby Beg.

Idiots are generally supposed to be as deficient in nerves as they are in brains. This is a great mistake. It would be difficult to find anyone more sensitive than an idiot, unless it be a genius, so nearly do extremes meet. Some trifling circumstance had offended Bobby Beg, now a member

of Diana's household ; and when he ascertained—no matter how at present—what was taking place, he felt impelled to go out and chatter about it. The first person he met happened to be Black Deborah, of whom he stood in fear and trembling. Bobby Beg knew nothing about the 'evil eye,' but he did know that the black eyes of the mad prophetess pierced his brain like a couple of gimlets. So, hoping to propitiate this haughty creature who was striding by in her black mantle, the simpleton doffed his brimless hat, stepped up to her, and humbly offered his dainty slice of gossip.

Now, Black Deborah's announcement about the millennium had proved a failure. Mr. Colquitt, who was sorely in need of money, had threatened to turn her out of her cottage unless she paid up her arrears of rent—for the millennium, it appeared,

was retrospective in its operation—and she was consequently at daggers drawn with all the Colquitts, Nessie included. Here, then, was a rare chance for revenge. That Nessie was a consenting party to Frank's marriage did not strike her for a moment; she supposed it to be a secret affair between him and Diana. Such being the case, she would have no difficulty in turning it to account. As a *benaaishnee*, or female fortune-teller, she not only kept her eyes open, but also heard all sorts of things from servants who came to her for advice, and by utilising these sources of information she had arrived at the conclusion that Ned Christorey was in love with Nessie. For this reason, and also because his father was an extensive landlord—Black Deborah was cunning, like all lunatics, and keen after the main chance—she

resolved to go to Ned with what she had just heard.

Instead of thanking Bobby Beg, she terrified him into silence by the most awful threats, and left the poor fellow cowering in the middle of the road, his yellow hair blown about by the wind, and his expression one of abject fear.

Hearing that Ned had been seen going up Arbory Street, Black Deborah strode after him, and overtook him and Toby outside the town, opposite a dilapidated old windmill. Without any preliminaries, she flung her news at him, her eyes blazing with malicious triumph as she did so. It completely took his breath away. When he had somewhat recovered, he would not believe it, but she forced conviction upon him. Then he, also supposing the marriage to be unknown to Nessie, bound Black

Deborah over to secrecy, which she readily promised, as she had attained her end.

The rise and progress of this rivulet of gossip is surely not uninteresting. It had its source in the brain of an idiot, who started it for little more than the sake of talking, that little being a wish to curry favour with a superior—an egregious failure, be it observed. It was then passed on to a lunatic, who discoloured it with malice and sent it on its way. And—here it differs from most of its kind—finally it was checked and dammed up by an honest man, a discreet and trusty friend.

If Ned's biography were written, it would be a record of continual self-sacrifice. The time had come for him to give another instance of it, for there descended on him this thunderbolt: Suppose Diana were to recover! In the confusion of the moment nobody had dreamt of questioning

her positive assertion, given on Dr. Myl-worry's authority, that she was dying. But Ned, dull old Ned, thought of the danger, and shuddered at it. What is more, he determined, if possible, to prevent such a dreadful thing as he saw might happen : a thing that would nevertheless have left him free to propose to Nessie again, with a very fair chance of winning her. The prize he had yearned for might be brought within reach if only he withheld his hand and bided his time ; but Ned was not Fabian Dalrymple, who was now standing at the bedside with some of these very thoughts in his head. Ned saw that interference in what was really no business of his, might cost him dear, especially where an impulsive fellow like Frank was concerned, but this did not deter him from doing what he conceived to be his duty.

So far as he could see, the only possible

object of this strange marriage was money. He therefore hurried back to the town at full speed, determined to offer Frank all he had. Fear of arriving too late spurred him onward; it was a race of awful excitement he was running. As he tore along the narrow street, his long legs stretched to their utmost limit, his arms swinging, and Toby trotting wonderingly behind, people came to their doors to look after him. Panting and red-faced, he reached the market-place. Leaving Toby at the base of the freestone column, lest the dog should bark and distress Diana, he dashed up the steps of her house.

In reply to his ring, a servant opened the door. Yes, Frank was there, she said. Ned demanded to see him at once on urgent business, and, without standing on ceremony, marched into the hall.

CHAPTER XII.

OVER THE BRINK.

THE marriage was duly performed; Mr. Hudson and Dalrymple went their several ways; and Frank, not knowing what to do in this novel and painful situation, lingered by the bedside of his wife, though he was burning with a feverish desire to flee away to his *fiancée*. But any perplexity he may have felt in regard to his anomalous position was speedily driven out by pity and distress; for Diana, thoroughly exhausted by her excitement, fainted now that it was over, before she could say a

word to him alone. Fortunately, Dr. Myl-worry arrived a moment or two later, and, at his request, Frank left the room.

On the stairs he met the servant, who delivered Ned's message. Ned himself he found standing in the hall, nervously fumbling with his hat.

'Come out!' gasped Ned, dragging him by the arm. 'Come out of this house at once! Frank, I have something to say that must be said without a moment's delay.' The urgency of the affair had made him throw aside his usual humility.

Startled out of his wits, wondering what new thing was coming upon him, Frank allowed himself to be led outside. They found themselves alone in the market-place, except for half-a-dozen of the doctor's sleek greyhounds grouped in a crescent around the ungentlemanly Toby, whom they were regarding with disdainful

curiosity, tempered, however, with awe when he looked up and showed his tusks. At the sight of his master, Toby lazily rose ; whereupon the greyhounds, pretending they had important business on hand, or rather on foot, hastily withdrew. Comedy and tragedy, tragedy and comedy, such is life.

‘ Am I too late ? ’ eagerly exclaimed Ned.

‘ Too late ! ’ said Frank, staring.

‘ This marriage. Is it true ? Has it taken place ? Oh, surely I ’m not too late ! ’

‘ Why not ? ’ asked Frank, so startled that he forgot to answer the question.

‘ But has it taken place ? ’

‘ Yes. ’

Ned dropped his friend’s arm and staggered back, his face brimful of misery.

‘ Oh, my poor, poor Nessie ! ’ was the cry that came from his noble heart. ‘ Oh,

Frank, what *will* she do? Surely you should have taken more care of her than that!' Then he lowered his voice to inquire eagerly: 'Does she know?'

'Of course,' replied Frank, angrily. 'Do you take me for a knave? There, Ned, I didn't mean that,' added he, seeing that Ned looked hurt; 'but I scarcely know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels. Tell me what's the matter.'

'Suppose,' said Ned, in a horrified whisper—'suppose Diana should recover?'

'Suppose Diana should recover!' cried Frank, repeating the words mechanically. And then, as the whole horror of the situation burst upon him, he clutched at his throat as if he were choking.

He saw now his terrible dilemma. He was so situated that, ardent lover as he was, he could scarcely help wishing for the death of a woman for whom he entertained

none but the most friendly feelings ; for if that event should not occur, he and Nessie would be eternally separated, and her happiness as well as his irretrievably shattered. With even more precipitation than usual, he had jumped headlong into the pit, where he might have to spend a lifetime in repentance. If anything could add to his anguish, it was this : that whereas Nessie had been actuated solely by the purest motives, he had certainly taken the money into consideration.

Not daring to go near Nessie, Frank went for sympathy to the sea, that strange and beautiful creature that can enter into our moods as no human being can do. If you would laugh, the sea will laugh with you, for none knows better the littleness of life ; and if a sudden grief should come upon you, lo ! the mighty deep is straight-way wailing. Filled to the lips with pas-

sionate impulses, it can be tender as a mother; fickle as a woman, it can also be staunch and true. Who can doubt its sex? To-day recklessly hurling itself against the stubborn cliff, to-morrow it may be coyly running from a dainty seaweed that entreatingly stretches out its arms towards the merry coquette. And oh, its many, many voices! Its voices of passion and pain, of joy and grief, of love and despair. See, these tiny wavelets toddling, lisping, laughing to the pebbly shore, while a wave follows, circling lovingly around them, lest they should stumble—what are *they* saying? For those who can hear, each is saying just what the leaves whisper to the wind—what, in fact, the whole of the inanimate world is ever telling the animate: that it has risen for a brief spell out of the great ocean to which it will return, and that it

will rise again for good or ill—never, never more in the same form, but in the myriad wavelets that come after it. Do you wonder, then, that this one little wavelet can laugh with you or sigh with you, according to your mood? Surely not, for it must be capable of every emotion, built up as it is out of the myriads that have preceded it.

And so it was that Frank found a solace in the companionship of the sea. There was pity in it, no doubt; but there was also energy, which drowned the voice of despair. Sitting on the upturned edges of the schist rocks at the end of the Race-course, with the promontory of Langness on his right, and the little St. Michael's Isle on his left, Frank listened to the water surging into the gulley below; watched it sweep the long brown stalks from its path and patiently mount the face of the cliff;

turned his eyes seawards, and saw the ships struggling in the glistening track which he knew was the tidal current; marked the white gulls contending with the wind overhead as they went towards the ledges among the headlands near the Calf; and then he too started to grapple with his difficulty. But when the sun sank behind the mountains—which always seemed to be saying to the sea, ‘Look at us, you frivolous monster! we neither laugh nor weep; we only watch and listen’—Frank was still at his task. The shadows flowed out of the east to quench the lingering light in the west; the stars crept out timidly, one by one, as if fearful lest that terrible fellow, the sun, should be somewhere in hiding, ready to pop back and extinguish them; the moon peeped above the water, and, seeing that all was clear, slowly soared into the blue sky; and

all the time Frank sat by the side of the lapping water. He had completely forgotten his surroundings, until there settled near him a redshank, which suddenly saw him, and went off shrieking. Then he rose with a start, and slowly made his way homewards, resolved to explain matters to Nessie as soon as possible, and so prepare her for the worst.

There were no lights visible in Claddagh House when Frank passed, the whole family being at the High Bailiff's. He had received an invitation himself, but had forgotten all about it; though, of course, he could not have gone under the circumstances. Though this dance was an attempt at cheerfulness after the bank failure, the High Bailiff would willingly have postponed it, but for several reasons could not very well do so. Moreover, as Diana was a comparative stranger to the

town, he felt her illness to be a less powerful objection than would otherwise have been the case. It was to be merely a quiet family party, he said, though there was nearly everybody there.

He lived in a very old house, with the narrowest of windows, situated in the little square which contained the House of Keys. When Frank arrived upon the scene, the blinds were drawn up so as to let those outside see what was going on within; the square was a confused mass of vehicles and sedan-chairs, their drivers and bearers talking loudly, laughing, and drinking jough, which was being brought out to them in great jugs; lanterns, borne by the servants of careful old maids who had walked in pattens, were flitting to and fro; and a crowd of curious men, women, and children filled up the background. So it was not without some difficulty that

Frank elbowed his way to a position near the door, where he had resolved to wait for Nessie.

The first thing he noticed inside the room was the white hair and ebony face of Black Charlie, a Bonny man of six feet four and broad in proportion, who had once been in the Army and now eked out his pension by playing the fiddle. This negro giant was just commencing the air of a country dance, 'The Black and the Grey,' an air that sent a poisoned arrow into Frank's soul, for it was invariably played at the weddings of the Manx peasantry.

Frank had scarcely recovered from this shock when he received another, even more severe.

It would have been very unlike Nessie if she had danced this evening, and she did not do so once, often as she was asked. But for her mother's command she

would not have been there at all. She spent most of the time in watching the solemn old ladies and gentlemen at whist, though her thoughts were really in the darkened room containing, as she supposed, Frank and his wife—already, perhaps, his no longer.

But presently he caught a glimpse of her through one of the windows, and, with a sudden anxiety which was not yet jealousy, he eagerly watched for her to pass the other in order to ascertain who was her partner. For some reason or other, several minutes elapsed before she came in sight again, during which time Frank was on thorns. At last he saw her, with a tall thin figure upon whose arm she was leaning and whose face was bent down to hers, and he felt chilled to the bone at recognising Fabian Dalrymple.

He seemed to be shut out for ever from the world in which she lived. Here was he, her affianced lover, skulking among the crowd in the darkness without, while music was playing and lamps were lighted for her, in an atmosphere which he could not enter. Then there arose within him a fierce jealousy of this man who walked by her side. He felt as if Dalrymple alone kept him from her, and hated him on this irrational ground with a mortal hatred. Watching the windows as a cat watches a mouse-hole, he saw that almost every time Nessie appeared, Dalrymple was with her, and the sight made his blood boil.

A servant, with the kindest intentions in the world, rendered Frank's position still more intolerable. Seeing him among the coachmen, she asked him why he did not come inside, on which he repulsed her

rudely. With knitted brows, he continued to stand there until the music ceased with 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' and a number of muffled figures came trooping down the steps.

Among the first to appear were the Colquitts, four in number, the insignificant head of the family trotting meekly after his portly wife, and Nessie and Mona behind. With considerable ingenuity, Mrs. Colquitt had contrived to make her husband responsible for the bank failure; and, wishing to pose as a martyr to his cruelty and idleness, had insisted upon walking, though it had hitherto been her practice to flourish about the town in a sedan-chair. This suited Frank admirably: it would enable him to escort Nessie home.

But before he could reach her side a tall, thin figure interfered between them

and a sarcastic voice said in his ear, 'No, no! Bachelors before married men, if you please.'

If those two had been alone together, Frank would certainly have struck Dalrymple, such a sudden rush of fury swept over him; but, as it was, he could only return an angry glare. The touch of Nessie's hand laid upon his arm, and her pretty face turned up to his with mingled love, pity, and appeal, softened him for the moment. She whispered, tremblingly,

'What news have you, Frank?'

'I don't know,' he stammered.

Her look of gentle reproof stung him the more because he felt it to be deserved.

'You should be with her, dear, shouldn't you?' she said.

In the bitterness of his heart he strode off without another word. Even she had sent him away from her! And now he

asked himself was it not partly for her sake that he had done this thing? Yet here was she walking homewards with this insolent fellow whom he loathed, while she sent him to wander alone through the night. This was not strictly true, but Frank's blood was turned to gall.

Arrived in the market-place, he stopped before the house where he had so recently been married. After a hesitation brought to an end by the sound of approaching wheels and footsteps, he went round to the back door and knocked softly. A servant admitted him, and in the kitchen he heard all there was to tell. Mrs. Sherwood had been persuaded to go to bed; Dr. Mylworry had just gone, saying that he was to be called if any change took place; and the nurse was sitting with Diana, who was sleeping. That was all.

Some vague sense of duty which Nessie's words had aroused in him, kept Frank waiting about the house for some time; and when he eventually left, the town was a wilderness. He could hear the swish of the water on the beach and see the sentry pacing before the barracks; otherwise there was neither sound nor movement. The streets were lighted only by the moon and the stars, and the shadows clung to the walls of the Castle as if they were bent on taking it by assault. Finding some relief in the solitude of the night Frank passed his uncle's house and went as far as the drawbridge.

While he stood there, now sadly musing, now burning with rage against Dalrymple, with the chains clanking in the breeze overhead, there passed along the Douglas Road a procession that made him shudder. It consisted of merely two persons,

Macdonald and Clague. The banker, whose figure had been somewhat bowed by care, was looking behind him in terror, for his pursuer had just quickened his pace; if he had not been moving onward, his attitude might be described as crouching. And close at his heels walked Clague, stealthily like a cat, with a ghastly white set face, teeth showing in front, clenched hands hanging down stiffly rather in advance of his body, and hair dishevelled, for he had lost his hat. After glaring over the smithy fire by day, he was hunting his enemy by night. They had been for their weird walk, and had returned through the town, over the stone bridge, and so along the road where Frank saw them. It was a sight not to be forgotten readily.

As he beheld in the moonlight the dreadful expression on Clague's face, he felt his flesh creep all over. 'And, oh, to

think that I might come to this !' involuntarily escaped from his lips, when the two men disappeared. It was a danger certainly ; but by recognising its existence, Frank took the first step towards avoiding it. He went home saddened, awed, fearfully thinking of the future. So much, so very much, depended upon the question whether Diana would live or die. It was a terrible thing that such a question should have become possible.

When Frank came downstairs next morning, he had to tell his uncle he was a married man.

Mr. Maddrell who had already done several hours' work, had just commenced breakfast, which was not such a curious meal as usual. He had been in the habit of mixing everything he could lay his hands on ; his porridge, for example, being generally rendered more palatable by the

aid of milk, butter, sugar, and even honey, treacle, and marmalade—a fine old mess when properly jumbled up together. But this morning, so careful had he become for the sake of his nephew, he was making wry faces over porridge neat ; for the sprinkling of sugar, ostentatiously displayed, was merely for the purpose of deluding Frank into thinking that everything was the same as usual. The rest of Jacob's breakfast consisted of a salt herring, one of last winter's stock which the servants had not yet fulfilled their duty in eating up. That he did not impose the same rigid economy upon others, goes without saying. There were rashers of bacon, and eggs, and several other things for Frank, who had been obliged to let his uncle go his own way, the latter always insisting that a young man required far more than an old one did.

At first startled and dismayed by Frank's news, Mr. Maddrell afterwards became very grave and thoughtful. Sitting in one of those old-fashioned arm-chairs, not unlike in shape and size a bow-window, and covered with American leather, he stared at the porridge before him, yet knew not it was there. When he spoke it was with surprising shrewdness for a simple-minded old bachelor, and with a quiet self-possession that he so often showed when others were flurried.

'Diana loves you, Frank, I feel sure,' he said; 'and now that you are her husband, her love for you will probably effect her recovery.'

'Then,' burst from pale-faced Frank, 'what shall I do?'

'The position is entirely of your own making, my boy. You must put up with it. I don't wish to say anything that

sounds unkind.' He stopped to gaze sadly after Frank, who was making off, without having tasted a morsel. It was in tones of gentle warning that he called after his nephew. 'Above everything, Frank, remember that Diana is now your wife.'

The reminder was not unnecessary. Frank was rapidly drifting into the frame of mind which would make Diana appear in the light of an enemy: which would, in fact, compel him to see in the hand of every man a dagger directed against himself. He had already reached this mood with regard to Dalrymple; he had even felt indignant with Nessie, poor little thing, who cared far more about his interests than about her own; and he was now irritated at what he considered his uncle's want of sympathy, on which point enough has been said to show how far from the

truth he was. There is no saying whither this perilous road might have led him, but for the recollection of what he had witnessed on the previous night. Whenever he thought of that scene, his rising passions experienced a sharp and salutary check.

When Frank left the breakfast-table, he went out to inquire after Diana. As he approached the house, he became conscious of a horrible temptation—a strange mingling of hope, despair, love, and friendship—to look whether the blinds were drawn down. But he resisted it bravely, keeping his eyes rivetted upon the ground and walking rapidly to lessen the time. He felt, however, that he was being watched by many curious spectators, for his marriage was already town-talk and had created a tremendous sensation. Only this feeling held him from actual running,

and even then he could not help springing up the steps at a bound.

Mrs. Sherwood, looking much better for her night's rest, received him in the sitting-room downstairs. Diana, she said, had slept fairly well ; had asked for him when she awoke ; and was now asleep again. Dr. Mylworry, who appeared to be rather at sea in the case, considered this an excellent sign. He even held out some hope now that she might recover.

What was Frank to say ? What was he to do ? Was he glad ? Was he sorry ? I cannot tell you, for he could not tell himself. The day passed—he knew not how ; the night came with its still more intolerable burden ; and when the morning broke, it was only to startle the town with another catastrophe. A catastrophe that sent a thrill through every nerve in Frank's body.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND DROWNED.

THERE was often to be seen trotting about the town a rare old fossil called Jonathan Vondy. He was curved and brown and furrowed; except for his little twinkling eyes, his weather-worn face was as passive as the rocks around; and his clothes afforded no clue to the age of the curious specimen embedded in them. He had, however, a character for strict integrity, so that he must have belonged to some very distant epoch. He had also a genial disposition, several wives sleeping in Malew

church-yard, and another occupying his little cottage, which he himself seldom entered night or day, for it was his business to attend to the drawbridge.

Jonathan did his work thoroughly; whatever he promised he faithfully fulfilled, whether it was his ordinary duty or looking after a boat on a stormy night or providing a supply of fish for a dinner on the morrow. Nobody could imagine when he slept, if indeed he ever did sleep, and it was currently reported that he had not been out of his clothes for years. Nevertheless, he was once caught napping; or, rather, he caught himself napping.

About midnight, long after everybody else in the town was in bed, this hale old man was smoking his pipe on the quay, when he happened to look in the direction of the drawbridge, and saw, to his amazement and dismay, that half of it had been

raised. He had been standing by the side of it less than half-an-hour before, but had left his station there because it was a boisterous night, dark and cheerless. The act must therefore have been committed within that period. But with what object?

Being a cool-headed old sailor, ready enough in a case of emergency, Jonathan knocked the ashes out of his pipe, put it in his waistcoat pocket, and trotted to the spot. The first thing he did was to raise the other part of the drawbridge, which—please observe this, for it was afterwards relied on in court as an important piece of evidence—was the half nearest the town. As it had been before, somebody might have inadvertently walked over the edge and tumbled into the harbour; but this danger being now averted, Jonathan could safely go off to get assistance. He soon returned with three or four hobblers whom

he had called out of bed to help him, and together they lowered the two wooden walls into their proper positions.

Puzzled at what seemed a most dangerous practical joke, and rather afraid lest some accident should have happened, Jonathan spent some time in peering into the harbour, but could see nothing floating in the water. Then he went to the sentry opposite the guard-room. The soldier, who had sought the slight shelter of his box, had neither seen nor heard anybody pass ; but, as he said, several might have done so on such a dark and windy night without his having noticed them.

Anything but satisfied, Jonathan poked about the quay all night, and when the morning came he was still at it. He possessed in a large degree the patient perseverance which is born and bred of the

sea; he was superstitious enough to carry about, attached to his neck by a piece of ribbon, a wren's feather and a bollan's cross to ward off shipwreck or other disaster; and while the one influence made him associate any unusual occurrence with evil, the other impelled him to find out what that evil might be. So he conducted his search in the same untiring way that had enabled him to get hold of many a useful piece of wreckage, until at last his wife—the one in the cottage, of course—came out and forcibly dragged him off to breakfast. But not long afterwards he was back again.

There were two short, low walls on each side of the approach to the drawbridge; and there the hobblers usually sat or lounged, waiting for something to turn up, and meanwhile engaged in silent chewing,

or discussing the merits of a vessel recently arrived, or playing draughts with pebbles on chess-boards chalked on the limestone slabs. As Jonathan approached this spot after his breakfast, there was a game in progress between a Manxman and a Scotchman who had been bragging of what he could do, so it excited considerable interest, and all the men were gathered around to watch.

Jonathan, however, went to the other wall and leaned moodily against it. While he was peering down into the harbour, his attention was arrested by something close to a punt which was attached to the stern of a small schooner. Looking more closely he perceived it to be a hand and part of an arm rising straight out of the water. Though he had been in many perilous situations and seen many fearful things, he afterwards confessed that nothing had

ever affected him more than the sight of that hand, stretched out as if in a mute appeal for help.

Jonathan's exclamation brought the other men to his side. They gazed for a time in silent awe at what he showed them, and then went timidly along the quay towards it. When opposite the punt they saw, on the other side of it from the hand, a white face staring glassy-eyed. The face was that of Macdonald. There could be no doubt that he had been dead several hours.

With characteristic caution, Jonathan called the harbour-master before proceeding any further, and the harbour-master, when he had examined into matters for himself, sent to the police-station, a little niche in the Castle wall near the gate, for the chief constable, who presently arrived and assumed the command. There was

still plenty of water in the harbour—about the same amount as when Jonathan made his discovery on the previous night, high water having occurred midway between. Some of the men were, therefore, sent on board the schooner, a couple descended into the punt, and so the body was gently disentangled from the vessel's moorings, around which it had been twisted by the combined effect of the river and the tide. They were very tender with it, these rough fellows; though the banker had been execrated for the ruin he had brought on the town, all that was forgotten now. When they had decently covered the face with a tarpaulin, they set off to carry their melancholy burden to the house opposite the smithy, where, at this very moment, Clague stood at his post—a madman in marble.

Frank, who had just been to inquire after Diana, came suddenly upon the grim

procession. It was not by any means the first of the kind he had seen; those who live by the side of the sea—the merry coquette of a summer day—have, alas! only too many opportunities in this way. But his must be a strange nature that is not softened, rather than hardened, by such sights; and few were more impressionable than Frank.

Reverently removing his hat, he went forward delicately, as Agag did to Samuel, to ask what had been the name of the nameless thing they were carrying with such tenderness. When he was told 'Macdonald the banker,' every particle of colour fled from his face. This, then, might be the end of it, unless he curbed the passions that were struggling within him! Murder might be the end of it! For Frank, thinking of what he had witnessed only two nights before, could not

but regard Clague as the cause of this man's death. And yet, such is the irony sometimes meted out to the double-headed race of lawyers who think with one head and argue with the other, it afterwards fell to Frank's lot to defend Clague.

The Isle of Man is divided into sheadings, parishes, and quarterlands. Every sheading has its coroner; but he has not, as in England, anything to do with inquests. There are four officials appointed for the performance of this important duty, generally the High Bailiffs of the four towns, each being then called the Coroner of Inquests for the district. In the case of Macdonald's death, the duty fell upon the High Bailiff of Castletown.

As soon as the event had been notified to him, he summoned a jury and proceeded to the house. When the body had been inspected, most of the jurors huddling

like frightened sheep in the doorway, they adjourned to a room downstairs, where the witnesses were already assembled.

The High Bailiff, a particularly cautious man, instructed the jury that all they had to do was to certify as to the actual cause of death. He would therefore especially direct their attention to the medical evidence. They were not a court of justice; and even if they held that the deceased had not died through his own act, it was not for them to point suspicion at anybody without the clearest evidence, for the matter would then be carried in all probability before another tribunal.

Dr. Mylworry was the first witness. He had carefully examined the body, and found no marks of violence. In his opinion, deceased had been asphyxiated by drowning. With regard to the time, he was more indefinite, but eventually fixed

upon midnight with a margin of a few hours on either side.

Mrs. Qualtrough, Macdonald's house-keeper—he was a widower with no family—deposed that her master left the house shortly after ten on the previous night. She could not account for his death herself, but she had heard the neighbours say——

The High Bailiff closed his gold snuff-box with a snap and promptly stopped her chatter.

The only other important witness was Jonathan Vondy. As we already know what he had to say, it need not be repeated.

Then followed some evidence as to Clague's attitude towards the deceased—similar to what Frank could have given had it been necessary; a vague statement that Black Deborah had been hovering

about the scene shortly before midnight ; and finally a wishy-washy stream which his worship soon checked.

Following the line laid down by him, the jury returned an open verdict 'Found Drowned.' And the proceedings terminated. It was a quick thing for a coroner's inquest ; at least it would be considered so in England now-a-days.

The matter was not allowed to rest here, however, for the chief constable now stepped upon the scene. Armed with a warrant he and another constable proceeded to arrest Clague. They found him in the smithy, not standing up to glare across the road as usual, but sitting on a rusty plough by the side of the fire. He had been 'stupid like,' said the blacksmith, ever since he saw the body being carried into the house opposite.

They had brought handcuffs, in case of

necessity, but had no need to use them. When he understood what they wanted of him, he went quietly enough. There was a crowd in waiting outside, of course, and it increased in number as they approached the Castle-gate. Not a little proud of their prompt capture, and pretty confident they had not made a mistake this time, the constables marched along with a very soldierly bearing, while the haggard stunned man between them seemed quite unconscious of his position. Those who eagerly pressed forward to look at him, drew back with a murmur of pity, so great was the contrast between the flourishing tradesman that might have been and the prisoner, charged with murder, that actually was.

The crowd stopped outside the Castle, none following along the narrow circling passage between lofty walls to the great

iron-studded gate, with a little door in it, which marks the boundary of the outer keep. There are some stone steps on the right leading to the court-house, and a number of houses on the left. The constables took their prisoner into an office where they handed him over to the governor of the gaol. His name having been entered in the books, a couple of turnkeys next took charge of him. One, jangling a bunch of enormous keys, opened another great iron-studded gate, and, when they had passed through, closed it with a jarring clash which at last awoke in Clague some sign of sensibility. He looked round with a start, as well he might, for he was now cut off from the world in which he had lived. He was conducted to a small dark and dreadful cell : and here, buried alive within fifteen feet of solid masonry, he remained for many a long day.

Although it is somewhat anticipating events, it may be better to state briefly here the course of procedure in this miserable case. There will then be no need to refer to the intermediate stages again.

The prisoner was first committed for trial by the magistrates. Then the Attorney-general, having been informed by the governor of the gaol that Richard Clague was in custody on a charge of murder, called upon the Southern Deemster to institute a court of inquiry. This preliminary court consisted of the Deemster and six special jurors belonging to the sheading of Rushen in which the parish of Malew is situated, for the statute requires that they should be chosen from the sheading where the crime has been committed. Knowing Clague's antecedents, they may have been unconsciously biassed against him ; at any rate, they sent the case on to

the Court of General Gaol Delivery, as the Manx Assizes are called. May and November were the usual times for holding this court, unless the Lieutenant-Governor, who sat as president, should select an earlier date. So Clague had about two months of suspense before him : a period that, whatever change it wrought in him, brought his mother to her death-bed and transformed his sweetheart, Ruth Teare, from a girl into a heavy-hearted woman.

Many hard things have been said against clannishness, but it had one pre-eminent virtue : it was a far more efficient check upon crime than a multitude of policemen. For, besides the reputation of the individual, there was the reputation of the community to be kept clear of the mire, and every tie of kinship and friendship was a link in the chain that performed this double function. Hence, serious

offences were rare in the island, and the supposed murder by Clague was considered a terrible reproach upon the whole town. This feeling went far towards eradicating any pity for him, and might, if he were acquitted, isolate him hereafter. But it nevertheless claimed that he should be defended in the best way possible. Public opinion was not, therefore, very well satisfied, when a young advocate like Frank was selected for this onerous duty.

Mrs. Clague sent for him soon after she heard what had happened. Stricken down by the news, feeling that she would never again be able to look her neighbours in the face, she had taken to her bed. And there Frank found her, attended by Ruth, whose tears had been dried up by this last catastrophe.

She wished him to undertake the defence for a very womanly reason : because

he had been friendly to her son in his better days, and the last advocate he had had anything to do with. She produced a worsted stocking, thriftily darned, containing a considerable number of sovereigns, which she emptied upon the patchwork coverlet. She had been saving up the money for many, many years, in order to pay for her funeral and also to leave a little behind her. As the withered hands tremblingly shook the coins from their resting-place, her eyes again filled with tears. Between what she had proposed and what had been disposed for her, it was indeed a sad contrast for the poor old thing.

‘Take it all,’ she said, in her quavering voice. ‘The Lord’s will be done. But eh! Master Frank, it’s sometimes hard to say it’s for the best.’

Notwithstanding the calamity that had

befallen her, she still retained her pride and independence, and so strenuously did she insist upon Frank's taking the money, that he was obliged to do so. He determined, however, to return it to her at the earliest opportunity, which would probably occur in connection with her son's ill-fated deposit at the bank.

Under other circumstances the conducting of this case would have afforded Frank the greatest gratification, his work having hitherto lain in the inferior courts where the honour was as scanty as the remuneration. But, as events had turned out, the chance of rising in his profession brought only bitterness and regret, until he thought of his uncle who would be delighted at being asked to assist in a case of such importance. This thought made Frank feel rather more happy.

As he walked along the street from Mrs.

Clague's house, he looked very much subdued. The change which was apparent in his bearing as well as in his expression, had originated with the shock in the morning and had been intensified by his recent interview. It suggested a large amount of self-restraint—almost a new thing with him. And surely if any man had need to keep his feelings under bit and bridle, Frank had. Diana was better and likely to recover, in which case he would be married to one woman whom he did not love, and engaged to another whom he did! A husband and yet not a husband, what was he?

Distractedly puzzling over this question, he heard a merry voice singing behind him :

‘The king can only sing a song,
And I can do the same ;
I sings some short and others long,
And that's the for I came.’

When the words ceased, Frank felt himself tapped on the shoulder and, turning round, saw Bobby Beg, grinning.

‘What can I do for you, Bobby Beg?’

‘Nought, Masther Frank.’

‘Then what do you want?’

‘Can I spake with you, Masther Frank?’

‘Certainly,’ replied Frank, little dreaming of the bomb the Simpleton was about to drop upon him.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER ACCOMPLISHED FACT.

SHORTLY before Frank's engagement, Mrs. Sherwood and Diana were walking in the garden behind their house. They were talking earnestly, without any heed to Bobby Beg who was digging close by. Diana had in her hand some scraps of paper which she dropped from time to time, one here and another there, carelessly and yet not without some method.

'Mother,' she said, 'did you ever know me miss a thing I had set my heart upon? No, you never did. And I tell you this: I love Frank and intend to marry him.'

‘Hush!’ said Mrs. Sherwood, nodding warningly at Bobby Beg.

‘Nonsense! He’s only a fool.’

The fool has yet to be discovered who can with equanimity hear himself called an unqualified fool. Bobby Beg took it seriously to heart; from that time he kept a vigilant watch upon his mistress with the vague idea of finding out something to his advantage. When Frank and the chaplain entered the house, Bobby Beg saw them, and, by an easy process of reasoning, concluded that Diana’s expressed intention was on the point of fulfilment. A servant who listened at the door until she heard the commencement of the marriage service, verified his conclusion; from which he sprang to another, very characteristic of an idiot’s low cunning—that Diana was shamming. This was the story communicated by him to Black

Deborah, and by her to Ned, who put his foot on it and crushed it. Feeling that he had not got enough satisfaction out of it, Bobby Beg now brought it to Frank.

‘She called me a fool, Masther Frank,’ said he, still harping upon the same theme. ‘It’s not always safe, though, to say things before a fool.’ By which remark Bobby Beg proved himself to be wiser than he looked.

‘And have you come here,’ demanded Frank, when he could collect his thoughts, ‘to tell lies about—a lady?’

Bobby Beg’s blue eyes stared vacantly, the fear of another fiasco having driven his mind to the brink of a chaotic condition, into which another slight push would certainly send it. He took off the brimless hat, scratched his yellow head, and stared again.

‘Have you any proof?’ asked Frank, impatiently.

‘Proof!’ slowly repeated Bobby Beg, looking at the ground. ‘Proof! Never heard tell of it.’

‘Confound the fellow! Have you anything more to say?’

‘Nought. But will you just look at this, Masther Frank?’

After fumbling among the many pockets of his three coats, he produced a soiled sheet of paper which had once been torn into small pieces and had afterwards been pasted on a grocer’s bag. They were, in fact, the very pieces that Diana had thrown away in the garden. Having a certain jackdaw-like propensity which led him to appropriate the most useless things, Bobby Beg had carefully collected them, and this was the result. Unable to read, he had asked Jonathan Vondy to decipher the writing for him, and Jonathan, after wisely looking through his spectacles at the paper

held the wrong side up, had declared it to be something about a shipwreck. He was by no means as wide of the mark as he might have been. However, this explanation did not accord with Bobby Beg's ideas, so he appealed to some one else, who read the paper more literally.

It was, as Frank saw, scribbled all over with one sentence, repeated many times with but few and slight variations; a thing one often does when holding a pen in one's hand, and absently thinking of a single idea. The sentence was this, 'I love him!' and the handwriting was unmistakably Diana's.

After all, it did not amount to much; a dispassionate mind would doubtless have rejected it entirely. But Frank, labouring under a sense of injury, saw in it a corroboration of Bobby Beg's story, which, he forgot, it might have suggested. How else

was Diana's recovery to be explained? Dr. Mylworry had described it as little short of marvellous: she had appeared to be in the very jaws of death but two days ago, and now she was fairly on the road to health. Why, even his uncle had said she was in love with him!

In the end Frank treated Bobby Beg with more courtesy than Black Deborah had done, and went off to interview Diana. He had not actually judged her as yet, he said to himself; he would be guided by her answers to his questions. At the same time his mind was certainly not free from prejudice.

Mrs. Sherwood conducted him upstairs.

'I wish to speak to Diana alone,' he said to her at the door. 'I have something very particular to say to her.'

'Nothing that will agitate her, I hope, Frank?'

He had not thought of this, a sure sign he was not in love with Diana.

‘No,’ he replied, doubtfully, ‘I don’t think so. I’ll be careful what I say and how I say it.’

Mrs. Sherwood who did not know what to think of the present state of affairs, looked at him anxiously. It did not need a mother’s eyes to see that something unpleasant was to be expected. She had no great confidence in this impulsive young fellow’s powers of self-control, but, knowing what her daughter’s wish would be, allowed him to enter the room alone.

Though still very weak, Diana had regained much of her former self; but with a difference, which it is not éasy to describe. It was hard to imagine her as ever having been frivolous, giddy, or capricious; the worst part of the woman seemed to have been merged in the tender love of the

wife. With an affectionate and judicious husband, she had, one would have said, a long and happy life before her. The pale blue jacket, prettily edged with lace, which she wore now, lent more colour to her cheeks than they really possessed, and the colour deepened as Frank entered. She greeted him with just such a smile as a young mother bestows on her new-born babe. But his frown never relaxed; he pretended not to see the hand she held out to him; he placed a chair at some little distance from the bed and sat down without a word.

Diana's beautiful eyes were fixed on him with apprehension. They never once left his face until he had told his story. Then she stilled her heaving bosom, and said coldly,

‘We are beginning life together badly, Frank. Distrust between husband and

wife—have you thought what it may lead to? Did you desire my death so very earnestly that you must be unjust?’ But the tenderness that was in her could be restrained no longer, and her whole soul went out in the cry: ‘Oh, Frank, I love you—I love you—I love you.’

It is not every man who could turn a deaf ear to such an appeal from a beautiful woman. But, if Frank was nothing else, he was at least constant to Nessie. It may be said that this very constancy had now become a sin. Possibly; the art of accommodating one’s self to circumstances is not confined to weather-cocks, but Frank had it not. He had very many faults and this among them.

‘Then it’s true,’ he exclaimed.

Diana’s look of reproach went through him like a knife. When she had recovered from the shock caused by his words, she

said, 'No, it's not true. Yet you are so hard on me—so terribly hard—that, when you have heard all, you may not hold me altogether innocent. Listen, Frank, and bear with me gently. Oh, my husband, won't you love me a little?'

As Frank continued to stare silently at the carpet, it was with a weary sigh she went on :

'Hear me, then, before you judge me ! That afternoon when I learned you were pledged to another, there was not a more miserable woman in the world. I felt utterly desperate. My mother only increased my burden by incessant inquiries as to what was the matter, and at night I went away by myself to the rocks at Scarlett. There, as she told you, I caught a cold. It grew worse, and I did nothing to stop it. Why should I? Alone, hopelessly alone, I didn't care what became of

me. I really wished to die—for you, Frank ; indeed, I almost tried to die, for I neglected to take the doctor's remedies. At last, he said the end was at hand. Then—then, and not before—an idea entered my head. I thought I saw a way of doing you a good turn and at the same time of gaining a short but inexpressibly sweet pleasure for myself. I mean, by our marriage.'

She almost sobbed out the last word and looked at him wistfully for some sign of relenting. But, getting none, she resumed in the same sad low tones :

' But as soon as we were married, I was seized with a desperate longing to live : to enjoy that pleasure—the pleasure of being your wife—a little longer. I now obeyed the doctor's orders ; love and hope gave me new strength ; I am recovering, as you see. But for what ? That remains

with you. Do you remember our conversations together? Do you remember telling me you would manfully accept an accomplished fact? I have relied upon that. Frank,' she said, softly, and a blush stole over the lovely face which was turned fondly towards him as it rested on the pillow, 'my husband, you have never once offered to give me a kiss; will you kiss me now?'

As she concluded her lips closed involuntarily and formed themselves into the most bewitching shape in anticipation of the coming kiss; but when she saw Frank's unbending attitude, there came a flash into her eyes which should have warned him of the danger ahead. He did not see it, however, and her tears soon extinguished it. She lay back tired, white, and scarcely breathing as she listened to him.

‘It seemed possible,’ said Frank, speaking with great deliberation and taking no notice of her question, ‘that your share in the matter had been different from what I now see it has really been. For my unjust suspicions, I humbly beg your pardon, Diana. As the same time, you yourself admit that you gave some cause for them; you misled the doctor and therefore misled me. That fact cannot but influence my conduct in the future, for there is another besides myself to be considered.’

‘Oh, Frank!’ exclaimed Diana, shivering piteously. This cold dispassionate way of speaking, so unlike himself, struck her with a deadly chill. She began to fear that what she had striven for so hard, might, after all, be farther off than ever.

‘Any wrong against myself, I hope I could forgive; the slightest wrong against Nessie, I can’t. It was her sweetness’—

poor Diana winced at every word—‘her goodness, her kindness, and her pity for you, that induced her to consent to our marriage; it was that and nothing else. Yet by that very act she is compelled to suffer bitterly for—for ever,’ said he, with a wrench. ‘And why? Because you misled the doctor and me. By the way’—he started and looked fixedly at her—‘did your father make such a will as you described to me?’

‘Do you doubt me?’ she indignantly demanded, after a short hesitation. But it was only a flash. She went on, piteously: ‘Oh, Frank, how hard you are! Why won’t you see without my having to tell you everything? You had lost your money, and I wished you to have some of mine. I thought and hoped my death would do some good—some good to you, dear. Was I wrong? I wanted to benefit

you, Frank—you and mother equally.’

Frank seemed rather puzzled. He had attempted to interrupt her, but she had continued talking, and so his question was not repeated.

‘I pity you from my heart,’ he said, rising.

She made an imploring gesture to stop him, but he continued, relentlessly :

‘As I pity Nessie and as I pity myself. But for the great wrong you have done us we must never meet again under the same roof.’ He strode from the room and left her sobbing bitterly.

If Frank had looked before him as he rushed out of the house he would certainly have avoided Dalrymple and Nugent who were talking in the market-place. But he did not see them or indeed anything. His grievance which had now assumed a definite shape had quite upset him, and he

was the more agitated because of the effort it had cost him to control his emotion.

Dalrymple, who was carrying a large parcel under his arm, was the first to see Frank. He said, with a smile to Nugent:

‘Here comes the choleric islander. By George, Nugent, he is properly nobbled if ever a man was. I doubt if I could have done it better myself. Except for that lubberly fellow Christorey, I have it all my own way now.’

‘But how nobbled?’

‘Why, he married the widow for her money, hoping she would die, when he could marry the pretty—Miss Nessie Colquitt. But she recovers to spite him, and he is up a tree. Serve him right, I say. A more disgraceful thing I have never heard of.’

‘It does sound rather mercenary,’

admitted Nugent, 'if your version is correct. Is Mrs. Knighton better, then?'

'Good-afternoon,' said Dalrymple, turning to Frank. Then he added, with mock sympathy: 'I hope Mrs. Maddrell is better?'

It was the first time Frank had heard the name, and it cut him to the quick. But by a powerful effort he replied, quietly:

'Yes, thank you.'

'I'm exceedingly glad to hear it. You must have had a very anxious time.'

'Very,' said Frank, burning with a desire to kick the lanky drawling fellow who chaffed him with such consummate coolness.

'I'm just on my way to call at Claddagh House; you're not going in that direction, I suppose?'

'No,' replied poor Frank, though such

had been his intention; 'I'm going indoors.'

And he did go indoors, but he could not stay there. The sight of his old uncle sitting at his desk, waiting patiently for the client who had never yet appeared, was bad enough. But the idea of Dalrymple making love to Nessie was still worse; indeed, it was altogether intolerable.

So Frank soon followed Dalrymple to Claddagh House, whither Ned had preceded them. Seldom have three men met under stranger conditions.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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